

North West Regional Hospital COVID-19 Outbreak Plan Update

On Friday 10 April 2020, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation Tasmanian Branch (ANMF) Secretary Emily Shepherd, was advised of significant changes to health service delivery at the North West Regional Hospital (NWRH) and the Mersey Community Hospital (MCH) in response to the current COVID-19 outbreak at the North West Regional Hospital.

We appreciate that these are significant changes and will be causing distress and anxiety for many of you. The Department of Health have indicated that these changes are in response to the changed definition of 'close contact' in the context of, contact, with a positive COVID-19 patient. These changes mean that if you have spent 15 minutes or more, in the cumulative with a COVID-19 patient, you are required to isolate. As a result, significant action has been required at the NWRH and specifically on the medical and surgical ward.

The Department of Health have advised that this will now mean that at the NWRH:

- 1) All NWRH medical and surgical staff who have worked recently on these wards will need to isolate for 14 days from tomorrow morning, 11 April 2020
- 2) That all NWRH Medical and Surgical staff will be tested for COVID-19 and will also require re-testing for COVID-19 if symptoms arise during the 14-day isolation
- 3) No new admissions will be accepted onto the medical, surgical or paediatric wards at the NWRH
- 4) All Emergency Department (ED) presentations who need admission to these wards will be transferred to the Launceston General Hospital (LGH)

Any ANMF member who requires isolation but is not able to undertake the 14 days at home or lives with a vulnerable person who is in a high-risk category for COVID-19, should alert their manager and request alternate accommodation from the Tasmanian Government.

All members should be aware that these 14 days isolation will be paid leave based on your projected roster, or if you have worked on the ward as a casual, you will be paid for any booked shifts or an average of your most recent work activity.

If you become symptomatic during your 14 days isolation and test positive to COVID-19, the ANMF advise members to lodge a worker's compensation claim.

At the MCH, significant changes will be implemented as of 10pm tonight 10 April 2020, in response to the COVID-19 outbreak management at the NWRH. Due to the number of staff required to enter isolation at the NWRH, the Tasmanian Health Service (THS) are finding sustainable staffing a challenge. The THS have therefore as part of the Emergency Response made the decision to close the MCH ED completely from 10pm this evening to all emergency admissions and the close observation unit. The THS have advised that this is to create available nursing staff to allow continued health service delivery at the NWRH.

The ANMF understand that this decision is a significant change and one that has been made at short notice in response to the COVID-19 outbreak containment. ANMF have therefore been assured that:

- 1) Any staff member who has a contract of employment at the MCH and is required to travel to the NWRH will be paid the applicable travel allowance.
- 2) These arrangements will be reviewed continually and will be reverted once the NWRH outbreak is contained.

The ANMF has also enquired with the Department of Health if any member with dual employment e.g. employment with the THS and an aged care facility, will be compensated for any lost earnings as a result of needing to isolate or travel to the NWRH. The Department of Health have indicated that they will seek advice and advise accordingly. Any member who is in this position should contact ANMF for support.

As part of the overall response to the NWRH outbreak, all admissions for medical, surgical, and paediatric patients will be transported from the NWRH ED to the LGH. Patients who have called an ambulance from the North West Coast may also continue to be transported to the LGH ED, however the parameters for this are to be determined.

The ANMF acknowledge that this is likely to increase workloads at the LGH and specifically within the LGH ED, we therefore encourage all members with concerns to contact our Member Support Team.

Further, we recognise that this is a distressing time for members in the North West. We thank you for your hard work in serving the community and the personal sacrifices you are making. Know that we are with you and here for you. You are in our entire memberships thoughts as you work to contain and defeat the COVID-19 outbreak.

We encourage any members with concerns to contact our Member Support Team via membersupport@anmftas.org.au or for urgent matters phone (03) 6223 6777 or 1800 001 241 (if outside Hobart). Due to the COVID-19 situation, our Member Support Team are now practicing social isolation strategies and working from home. Bearing this in mind, email is the preferred and fastest way of contacting them.

Authorised by Emily Shepherd, Branch Secretary, 10 April 2020