

Submission to the NSW Upper House General Purpose Standing Committee 3 (GPSC 3) Inquiry into Registered nurses in nursing homes in NSW.

<http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/committee.nsf/0/D7A6228FCC493975CA257E6F0024A87D>

Cancer Council NSW is a not-for-profit organisation that is 97% community funded. We work in the areas of research, prevention, information and support, and advocacy with the aim of beating cancer. We also want to ensure that cancer patients have the best quality of life and that they receive optimum care throughout their life, and when they die. Therefore, we are concerned about the potential removal of registered nurses from nursing homes and other aged care facilities and the impact it may have on the safety and wellbeing of people with cancer who live there. Please find below our responses to the first of the Terms of Reference.

1. The need for registered nurses in nursing homes and other aged care facilities with residents who require a high level of residential care, in particular:

(a) the impact of amendments to the Aged Care Act 1997 (Cth) by the Aged Care (Living Longer Living Better) Act 2013 (Cth) on the requirement under s 104 of the Public Health Act 2010 to have a registered nurse on duty at all times in a nursing home, and in particular: (i) the impact this has on the safety of people in care

Cancer is the largest cause of disease in Australia and the incidence of cancer rises with age. The population of NSW is ageing and growing at an increasing rate. As a result it is estimated that, in the year 2021, 51,000 people will be told 'you have cancer'.¹ The good news is that advances in cancer prevention, early detection, diagnosis and treatment are allowing more people to survive and live longer with the disease. However, this also means that the burden posed by cancer is likely to increase. Not everyone who has cancer, or who has survived cancer, will live in a nursing home or other aged care facility. However for those who do, access to a registered nurse, when they need it, is important.

After a cancer patient has been released from hospital, a registered nurse may be required to administer a complex multi-drug regimen and assess the patient for side-effects and manage their care accordingly. They may also be required to assess and manage the side-effects of treatments such as radiotherapy or chemotherapy, provide support during rehabilitation, and coordinate multiple follow-up appointments. Side effects of cancer treatments may last many years, or in some cases a life-time, so access to skilled assessment and good clinical care may be required for many years after cancer treatment has been completed. Cancer may also result in acute, or chronic, pain which causes distress for the sufferer and their families. A registered nurse may be required to make a pain assessment, administer pain relief and provide the psychological help necessary to ease distress. A registered nurse is the one who can assess and manage change, or deterioration, in a cancer patient's condition and make a decision about the right time to transfer them to hospital.

Each year more than 13,500 people die of cancer in NSW accounting for over 25% of all deaths in this state.¹ A Cancer Institute NSW study in 2007 showed that approximately 9% of cancer patients died in a nursing home.² It is likely that, before their death, these people received some care from a registered nurse while they were in their own bed. Having a registered nurse available may also avoid a transfer to hospital during the dying process thereby avoiding unnecessary extra distress for all concerned.

Having a registered nurse on duty is not only important for the health and wellbeing of the patient and their family, but it may save the health system money by avoiding the costs associated with an unnecessary transfer to a hospital emergency department.

Cancer Council NSW strongly supports having a registered nurse on duty at all times in all nursing homes and other aged care facilities in NSW. We call upon the NSW Government to ensure that people with cancer that live, and die, in a nursing home or other aged care facility have access to registered nurse care as needed.

References

- (1) Cancer Institute NSW. Cancer incidence and mortality: projections 2011 to 2021. Sydney: Cancer Institute NSW; 2011.
- (2) Tabor B, Tracey E, Glare P, Roder D. Place of death of people with cancer in NSW. Sydney: Cancer Institute NSW; 2007.