

26 April 2016

Australian College of Nursing expresses serious concerns in regards to the fragmented health care in off-shore and onshore Immigration Detention Centres

In light of the tragic chain of events that contributed to the death of young asylum seeker Hamid Khazaei, as revealed by the Four Corners program, the Australian College of Nursing (ACN) reiterates its views on the health care of people in onshore and offshore Australian Immigration Detention Centres. The Australian College of Nursing also has grave concerns regarding the moral and ethical rights and obligations of the healthcare professionals providing care.

The Four Corners program has highlighted the inadequacies in the clinical management and delayed transfer of this young man, which played a significant role in his death. Australian College of Nursing advocates for the provision of equitable health care that includes culturally appropriate holistic health care. Access to comprehensive health care should be available to all persons regardless of visa status.

The Australian College of Nursing recommends the Australian Government review how refugee and asylum seeker healthcare is delivered in on-shore and offshore detention centres and in the community to ensure it meets healthcare standards available to all Australians. The standards of health care that is provided for refugees and asylum seekers should be publicly available as should performance data on health outcomes achieved for this population.

Australian College of Nursing stands united with our medical colleagues and other health professionals that work in the area on this issue and calls on the Australian Government to conduct an open, transparent review into the health management of this vulnerable population which ensures no other person suffers the same fate as Hamid.

An open and transparent review can only be realised if the doctors and nurses employed by the contracted health provider, are granted exception from the Australian Border Force Act 2015 (the Act), which prescribes a penalty of 2 years jail for the disclosure of protected information.

Nurses play an integral role in caring for asylum seekers in health facilities, both in Australia and in Nauru and Papua New Guinea. To provide expert and professional care, nurses must be able to uphold standards that ensure the delivery of high quality health care and be enabled to speak up when care is compromised, especially when people's lives are put at risk. The Australian Border Force Act 2015 undermines the ability of nurses to fulfil their professional and ethical obligations under both the Code of Professional Conduct and Code of Ethics for nurses in Australia. "These Codes outline the minimum standards nurses are

expected to uphold placing nurses in an impossible position,” stated Adjunct Professor Kylie Ward, CEO of the Australian College of Nursing.

As frontline health professionals nurses may be the only advocates available to persons in detention. Section 42 of the Act prescribes a penalty of two years imprisonment should a person working directly or indirectly for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (an entrusted person) disclose protected information regarding events that occur within detention facilities.

Nurses are therefore prohibited from disclosing information regarding access and quality of health care and information detailing issues which may put people’s physical and mental health at risk including sexual abuse, violence or the presence of inadequate living conditions.

Furthermore, as the Australian member on the International Council of Nursing (ICN) Australian College of Nursing believes the Act is also inconsistent with the ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses.

“Refugees and asylum seekers are often plagued by poor health status arising from poorly managed chronic disease and psychological issues, coupled with the consequences of physical and sexual violence. Australian College of Nursing believes that the nursing profession has a moral obligation to protect the human rights of refugees’ and asylum seekers’. Changes to the Act must be made to ensure nurses working within the immigration detention environment can fulfil their professional obligations without the fear of being prosecuted,” Adjunct Professor Ward said.

Ends _____

For interviews, or for more information, please contact Wendy Hooke on 0297457541 or 0448 004 039 or email wendy.hooke@acn.edu.au



Australian
College of
Nursing

Advancing nurse leadership

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is the national professional organisation for all nurse leaders and its aim is to ensure that the Australian community receives quality nursing care now and in the future. ACN is a membership organisation with members in all states and territories, health care settings and nursing specialties. ACN is also the Australian member of the International Council of Nurses headquartered in Geneva.

ACN, an organisation not afraid to intelligently challenge industry issues affecting the nursing profession or Australia's healthcare, is a well-connected and educated national body that drives change with people of influence to enhance the delivery of health services to the Australian community. ACN advances the skills and expertise of nurses to provide leadership in their contribution to the policy, practice and delivery of health care.

A membership organisation with members in all states and territories, health care settings and nursing specialties, ACN's membership includes many nurses in roles of influence, including senior nurses, organisational leaders, academics and researchers.

What is the role of the ACN to media?

- ACN provides trusted, well supported information about Australia's health care system, the delivery of health care, nursing leadership and the nursing profession.
- ACN has a number of media-savvy spokespeople within the organisation who can comment on Australia's health care system, the delivery of health care, nursing leadership and the nursing profession.
- ACN offers media with an alternative voice to that of an industrial relations perspective.
- ACN is in-the-know and can comment on health care matters of interest.
- ACN can respond to media requests in a timely manner and with subject/clinical expert's available on-hand for further discussion.
- ACN regularly respond to government updates pertaining to Australia's health care system.

What role does the ACN play?

The ACN are here to act and deliver results as agents of change. They are working towards a brighter future through advancing nurse leadership to enhance the delivery of health care to all. The organisation provides nurse leaders with access to relevant information, support and education will enhance Australia's reputation on the world stage.

Social media channels:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/acnursing>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/acn_tweet

LinkedIn: <http://www.linkedin.com/company/australian-college-of-nursing>