

JULIA GILLARD M.P.

Shadow Minister for Health

ABBOTT PEDDLES MUSINGS ON NURSE ROLES

While the Minister for Health, Tony Abbott muses about expanding the role of nurses in the media today, his mismanagement of the health system has left Australia critically short of nurses and many nurses are already seriously overworked.

There is a crisis in our medical workforce. Mr Abbott needs to explain how he is going to ensure there are sufficient numbers of nurses trained, sufficient rewards for increased qualifications and increased responsibility to keep nurses in nursing.

Australia deserves a Minister who does more than just muse about how nurses can fill in the gaps caused by the doctor shortage created by the Howard Government. Labor supports the expansion of the GP practice nurse initiative to all general practices as announced by the Minister but suggests the Minister has a closer look at the national crisis that has emerged on his watch.

Almost 40 per cent of our nurses are currently aged between 45-54 years and will be leaving the workforce in the next 10-20 years.

With the ageing of the nursing population and shortages especially serious in growing specialties like aged care and mental health, we need an estimated 4000 more nursing graduates. That means a 50 per cent increase in graduate nurses by 2006 in order to meet demand but the Howard Government continues to turn thousands away every year.

At La Trobe University in Melbourne last year around 900 mature age applicants and 627 Year 12 students, all of whom met the entry requirement, applied for just 100 nursing places. At UTS in Sydney last year there were 3,294 applications for the 565 nursing places along with 140 applications for the 30 places in midwifery.

With mental health nursing, the Minister for Health wants nurses to gain extra qualifications but is not interested in ensuring these additional qualifications are suitably recognised and rewarded.

Nurses who want post graduate mental health training must pay the full cost themselves – as much as \$50,000 – despite the fact that mental health nurses are on the National Skill Shortage List and that subsequent pay doesn't reflect these additional qualifications.

At the most recent *Nursing Leadership Conference* in Sydney, Minister Abbott refused to appoint a Chief Nurse to work with the Chief Medical Officer to ensure nursing was sufficiently recognised by the Commonwealth Government as an integral part of our health system.

It seems the Minister for Health is happy to talk about the role of nurses when it suits him but has failed to take the profession of nursing seriously.

11 APRIL 2006

CONTACT: Kimberley Gardiner 0417 428 123