

To: The Board,
Sydney Local Health District.

From: Winston Cheung,
Chair, Medical Staff Council,
Concord Repatriation General Hospital.

12th October 2022

Re. Proposed meeting of the Board of the Sydney Local Health District with the Concord Repatriation General Hospital Medical Staff Council, and Nursing and Allied Health Staff to Discuss Concerns regarding Governance, Patient Safety, and the Health and Wellbeing of Staff at Concord Repatriation General Hospital.

Dear Board Members,

I write to request a meeting of the Board of the Sydney Local Health District with myself, a delegation of members from the Concord Repatriation General Hospital Medical Staff Council, and representatives of the Nursing and Allied Health staff at Concord Repatriation General Hospital (Concord Hospital).

The reason for the proposed meeting is to discuss serious concerns regarding the governance, the safety of patients, and the health and wellbeing of staff at Concord Hospital.

I have been the Chair of the Medical Staff Council (MSC) at Concord Hospital for the last six months. During my time as MSC Chair and prior to becoming the MSC Chair I have been approached by many members of the Medical Staff Council, the nursing staff, the allied health staff, and hospital support staff at Concord Hospital regarding significant concerns about governance, the safety of patients, and the health and wellbeing of staff at Concord Hospital.

The nursing, allied health and medical staff tell me of many serious problems that befall Concord Hospital. The staff tell me that Concord Hospital has been poorly governed and has significant patient safety issues. It is only held together currently by the dedication and goodwill of the nurses, allied health staff, doctors and hospital support staff.

But significant dissatisfaction with the governance of the hospital has reached the point that staff are now resigning. This exodus of healthcare staff is threatening Concord Hospital's operational capability.

Immediate action must be taken to stem further loss of staff.

The staff tell me that the problems at Concord Hospital predated the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic did not cause the problems. It merely exacerbated the existing problems.

The staff tell me that this current exodus of staff was predictable, and has occurred because of two significant failures of corporate governance at Concord Hospital. Those failures of governance have been:

The failure to retain experienced staff who would have otherwise stayed if they had been treated better, and;

The failure to create an environment where staff felt safe to speak up.

The staff tell me that they are not prepared to raise these issues with the Concord Hospital administration because they do not feel it is safe for them to speak up.

All the staff who have raised their concerns with me fear reprisals. But they have confided in me because of my position as the MSC Chair. They spoke to me on the condition of anonymity and confidentiality.

The staff however tell me they are prepared to talk in an environment where they are provided adequate protection against reprisals.

The concerns that the Concord Hospital staff have cover many areas. The overall themes regarding the governance of the hospital, the safety of patients, and the health and wellbeing of staff include:

The prioritisation of monetary savings ahead of patient safety and the health and wellbeing of staff

The failure to provide safe conditions where staff can speak up and raise concerns without fear of reprisals

Intimidation and bullying by managers

The use of punitive measures to silence “troublemakers”

The failure to address the concerns from staff when they are raised

Poor governance of quality processes including:

The use of deception in data collection, to demonstrate that management practices are better than they actually are

The use of deception to manipulate hospital accreditation inspections, and therefore circumvent regulatory scrutiny, to demonstrate that governance and safety is better than it actually is

Underinvestment in education and training, and the failure to provide adequate professional development opportunities for all staff

Lack of consultation with staff and the community regarding priority setting

Failures in disaster preparedness

Ongoing industrial issues, including underpayment of staff

In addition to these problems there is a massive backlog of clinical priorities that still remain to be addressed at Concord Hospital. The following is not an exhaustive list, but some of these priorities that have been brought to my attention include:

Emergency Department

Significant shortage of staff and serious operational problems

Aged Care

Significant shortage of staff and operational problems

Anaesthetics

Significant shortage of staff

Burns Unit

Significant shortage of clerical and nursing staff

Gastroenterology

Significant shortage of staff and equipment problems

Infectious Diseases

Significant shortage of clerical staff

Intensive Care

Significant shortage of staff and resourcing problems

Nephrology

Problems with access to clinical services

Secretarial staff shortage

Neurology

Problems with access to clinical services

Staffing and resource issues

Neurosurgery

Significant shortage of staff

Ophthalmology

Problems with access to clinical services

Staffing and resource issues

Pain Services

Significant shortage of staff

Plastic Surgery

Significant shortage of staff

Radiology

Significant shortage of staff

Inadequate resources

Rehabilitation Medicine

Significant shortage of staff

Upper Gastrointestinal Surgery

Significant shortage of staff

I am writing to the SLHD Board because I have concerns that the Board may not be fully aware of the extent of the problems that the staff at Concord Hospital have raised with me.

I am also writing to the SLHD Board because I do not believe that the staff who have approached me have confidence that the administration at Concord Hospital can address their concerns adequately.

I request that the SLHD Board meet with myself, a delegation of members from the Concord Repatriation General Hospital Medical Staff Council, and representatives of the Nursing and Allied Health staff at Concord Hospital to discuss these serious issues.

At the meeting we want to discuss immediate actions that must be taken

To stem the loss of our valuable and experienced staff;

To improve the treatment of staff and to improve their working conditions; and

To create an environment which allows staff to raise concerns without fear of reprisals.

Yours Sincerely,

Winston Cheung,

Chair,

Medical Staff Council,

Concord Repatriation General Hospital.

Senior Staff Specialist,

Intensive Care Unit,

Concord Repatriation General Hospital.

Clinical Associate Professor,

Sydney Medical School – Concord, University of Sydney.