

STATEMENT OF MARGARET EILEEN MEARS of address know to the Queensland Nurses' Union of Employees

Qualifications and experience

- 1. I am a Registered Nurse licensed to practise in the State of Queensland. I have been registered since 1979.

Background

- 2. I am employed by Queensland Health as Clinical Nurse (NO3) in the Pre-admission Unit at the Bundaberg Base Hospital (BBH). I started in Pre-Admissions in 1999 as a Level 1 nurse. I have been acting in the Level 3 position since January 2004. While at the BBH, I have also worked on various projects such as the Informed Consent project and the Communications project. I've also worked as Nurse Educator and in Transitional Care.
- 3. My role in Pre-Admissions is to coordinate the admission of elective surgery patients. This involves interviewing patients before their operations, managing booking procedures and performing a full assessment of the patients at the Pre-Admission Clinic. I prepare all the hospital's patients having elective surgery and having general anaesthetics, this excludes, of course, emergencies. I also coordinate staff in relation to admissions. This means I liaise with doctors, anaesthetists and junior house officers from ICU. The doctor I have the most contact with is Dr Martin Carter.
- 4. From January 2004 I took on the additional role of managing the unit's budget, reports to management regarding the budget, extra clinics and patient follow up.

Involvement in ASPIC Meetings

- 5. I was an attendee of the Anaesthetic, Surgical Services (Day Surgery, Surgical Unit, Operating Theatre, and Elective Surgery Coordinator), Pre-Admission and Intensive Care (ASPIC) Meetings in my capacity as the nursing officer Level 3 in charge of the Pre-Admission Clinic. Dr Carter chaired these meetings, but was often not able to control Dr Patel who spoke over the top of everybody and often

11. Peter Leck called an extraordinary meeting of Level 3 nurses to discuss the media release of the Dr Patel issue following it being mentioned in parliament two days prior. I missed the beginning of the meeting as it had only been called that morning. When I arrived Peter was discussing the inappropriate behaviour of staff in the hospital and he made reference to the code of conduct. He suggested that we take what he had said on board, that we speak to our staff, and that there would be serious repercussions for anyone found breaking the code of conduct.

The 7 April 2005 Meeting with Mr Buckland and Mr Nuttal

12. I was notified by email that a staff forum, regarding the Dr Patel incident, was to be held at 3pm on 7 April 2005. Mr Peter Leck, Mr Gordon Nuttal and Mr Steve Buckland spoke to staff. All departments in the hospital were invited and represented at the meeting. There were about 100 – 150 staff members present. From the outset, I felt under attack. Mr Nuttal said that this is the third time I have been to Bundaberg in capacity as Health Minister, the other two were for positive reasons. He then continued by saying they had been in Springsure this morning to open a community health centre. He said "What a wonderful town. 900 people have raised \$230,000 to build this community health centre and now here we are in Bundaberg". I previously had held Mr Nuttal in high esteem following his initial visit to Bundaberg where he talked about people working together and working together to build a better health system. During his first visit he had used an analogy that we are all sitting in a boat rowing and he wants everyone rowing the same way and those who don't want to row with us can get out of the boat now. I felt he was working towards a better health system in Queensland and I supported this.
13. Mr Nuttal and Mr Buckland then proceeded to tell all present at the meeting that because of the release of the material in Parliament and Dr Patel's departure to America, the outcome of the inquiry would not be released. It would be fruitless as Dr Patel had left Australia.

14. These comments at this meeting infuriated me, and from feedback I received from other attendees, so were many of staff attending the meeting. The whole tone of the meeting was condescending and belittling.

15.

Mr Buckland said to us "No decent doctor would want to come to Bundaberg to work in these circumstances". They made us feel like we were all at fault and that we were not working together which was not the case. I felt they should have been addressing the issue of Dr Patel. I stood up at the meeting and told them that I in no way endorsed the behaviour of the person who sent the document to Mr Messenger or the behaviour of Mr Messenger, and that I was sure that 99.9% of the staff here today would agree with me. I then asked them if they were telling me now that nothing could be done to Dr Patel. Mr Buckland responded by saying "How are we going to get him back from America now?".

I was sitting at a table with Drs Carter, Miach, Stumer and Nydham and they all appeared to me to be furious about the meeting as well, but they didn't say anything.

16. As I was leaving the meeting a senior staff member said to me "Don't you like your job? Is that why you spoke up?" I found this comment to be typical of the type of attitude voiced by certain staff.

Dr Patel – Incidents

24. I personally had two encounters with Dr Patel where he was aggressive and shouted at me. I discussed both incidents with Carolyn Kennedy, who is the Assistant Director of Nursing. I felt that I had managed both of these incidents myself, and felt that it need not be taken any further.
25. While I had few personal encounters with Dr Patel, the position I hold at the hospital sees me coming in contact with the junior doctors on the surgical team and the doctors from ICU. On many occasions issues have been raised with me, in confidence by these doctors, regarding Dr Patel's bullying of junior doctors and Dr Patel's inappropriate patient care. For example, concerns that patients from ICU were not being transferred to large metropolitan hospitals when their care status had changed and they required a level of care that the BBH could not provide. I have always encouraged people to report incidents in the appropriate manner.

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Signed: MARGARET EILEEN MEARS

Date:

I Margaret Eileen Mears do solemnly and sincerely declare that the content of this my statement for the Bundaberg Hospital Commission of Inquiry (this declaration being on the last page of the statement comprising 6 pages) and I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing the same to be true and by virtue of the provisions of the *Oaths Act 1867*.

M E Mears

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MARGARET EILEEN MEARS

Declaration Taken By:

L. Bloman

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Lawyer

Date: 17 May 2005