



AWU submission

Lady Cilento Children's Hospital Independent Review

January 2015

INTRODUCTION

The Australian Workers' Union of Employees, Queensland (AWUEQ) represents over 8,000 health care workers, including both operational and support staff such as ward and store persons, orderlies, cleaners, food services and laundry staff, security officers, and multi-disciplinary clinical assistants, and clinical staff such as nurses, allied health professionals, indigenous health workers and medical practitioners.

Shortly after it opened, parents of patients raised serious concerns about the 'rushed'¹ opening of the new Lady Cilento Children's Hospital and reported a decline of patient safety and hygiene,² patient experience in terms of admittance times, transport, food and laundry facilities and, in addition, 'teething problems' including the lack of stock and equipment on wards.³ Whilst Health Minister Springborg dismissed parents' concerns and failed to visit the hospital, the AWUEQ is relieved to see that the Children's Health Queensland's (CHQ) is taking concerns seriously. The AWUEQ welcomes the CHQ's decision to bring forward the planned Independent Review into the quality of care delivered to patients during and after the transfer to the Lady Cilento Children's Hospital.⁴

AWUEQ SUBMISSION

We know that hospital workers want only to be able to deliver the best care and services possible to all Queenslanders. Indeed, hospital workers feel deeply frustrated when resources, organisational or managerial processes prevent them from doing their best. We also know that to provide the best care to patients, a holistic and integrated approach to care delivery must be in place.⁵ Holistic and integrated care approaches deliver more effective patient outcomes, experiences and safety, which in turn mean a more efficient use of scarce public resources. This requires planning every step of a patient's journey and putting the patients' holistic needs - clinical, mental, social and for children, in particular, the needs of their family - at the centre of all care provision, processes and services.

Yet in view of the reported deterioration of services in the new Lady Cilento Children's Hospital, the AWUEQ is not convinced that patient-centred and integrated services have been the focus of the new hospital or, at the very least, when considering the opening of the hospital. Below we offer just a few examples of decisions made by Queensland Health, which we feel overlook the importance of integrated care delivery and we call on the Review's team to look into this issue further.

¹ <http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/parents-slam-lack-of-services-facilities-at-lady-cilento-childrens-hospital/story-fnn8dlfs-1227151912018>

² <http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/health-bosses-fast-track-review-after-increased-safety-concerns-at-lady-cilento-childrens-hospital/story-fnn8dlfs-1227153236643>

³ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-12-11/lady-cilento-childrens-hospital-opened-too-soon-mother-says/5960070>

⁴ <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/childrenshealth/html/lcch-clinical-review.asp>

⁵ See for example, <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/integratedcare/Documents/integrated-care-info-summary.pdf> and <http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/audio-video/evidence-base-integrated-care>

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The privatisation of operational services

Patient outcomes, experience and safety and the delivery of integrated care do not simply rest on the work of clinical staff. Patients have a range of needs, which depend on the input of every hospital worker, performing a range of frontline and 'back room' duties. Our members pride themselves in the part they play in helping patients get better through providing nutritional food or cleaning wards to keep infections at bay.

A patient's journey can therefore be disrupted, or their needs and experiences jeopardised when hospital departments are disjointed or are working to different priorities.

On learning of Lady Cilento Children's Hospital plans to outsource many operational service roles, the AWUEQ raised concerns – not solely as this meant the loss of employment for around 80 long-term, dedicated staff and lower terms and conditions for the future workforce – but also due to the potential effect it would have on the delivery of integrated care. For instance, there have been many examples of the increase of hospital-acquired infections following the privatising of cleaning services caused in part because nursing staff no longer work as a team with the cleaning staff.⁶ Fragmenting the hospital staff team, by changing their employer (who ultimately changes their status within the hospital by reducing their terms and conditions, their hours and rosters according to their, often economic, needs) overlooks the importance of staff relationships, team-working and communication in delivering the best care for patients.

The AWUEQ would like the Review to consider whether the privatisation of operational services and the subsequent loss of well-trained and long-serving staff members, did contribute to the deterioration of services in the new hospital.

The 'rushed' opening of the hospital

Whilst teething problems are expected when a new organisation of any size opens, the extent of reported issues – from patient safety and hygiene,⁷ patient experience in terms of admittance times, transport, food and laundry facilities to the lack of basic stock and equipment on wards – raises the question why was the hospital opening not delayed? Why were these issues not foreseen and their potential impact on the quality of care deemed too large to risk opening as planned?

In view of the hospital's regional importance, with patients travelling far and wide from within the state to access its services, it simply does not make sense that, for example, it was deemed acceptable to open hospital doors without a café, transport or accommodation in place for parents and relatives to use. The needs of parents are critical to every child suffering from a serious illness: they need their parents to provide endless support during this trying time and their health and wellbeing has a critical

⁶ http://www.stopprivatisation.com.au/cleaning_services

⁷ <http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/health-bosses-fast-track-review-after-increased-safety-concerns-at-lady-cilento-childrens-hospital/story-fnn8dlfs-1227153236643>

knock-on effect to the patient's chances of recovery. Yet parents have struggled to meet their own basic needs within the new hospital and be there for their children throughout the day. This is neither fair nor acceptable to both patient and parents.

The AWUEQ would like the Review to report back on the timing of the opening of the Lady Cilento Children's Hospital, and uncover why the opening of the hospital was not pushed back to accommodate the delays obviously occurring in the completion of some vital facilities of the hospital. In short, why was the hospital opened when it was unable to meet the holistic needs of patients?