



## Nurse practitioner joins NMBA

**The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia has appointed its first nurse practitioner.**

Nurse practitioner Chris Helms (pictured) from Canberra was appointed to the board in September, after he applied last year.

"To be perfectly honest it's overwhelming," Mr Helms said. "But also really exciting to know that I'll be able to

see from a much wider perspective the issues that are affecting nursing more generally and how that relates to nurse practitioners."

Mr Helms is currently undertaking a PhD at the Australian Catholic University where he is researching nurse practitioner metaspécialties within clinical practices.

He also works one day per week at a GP practice and about once a month at a homeless clinic.

Mr Helms trained as a nurse practitioner in the United States and moved to Australia in 2006 to further his career.

"My experience as an NP has been a rather positive one," he said. "When I started working in private practice I was able to practice in a way that complemented GPs.

"For me, it's been a very positive thing, and for the people I work with, because they've seen that there is currently an imbalance in primary healthcare and there seems to be benefits in bringing in an expert nurse."

Mr Helms will take up his new position

immediately and said he's looking forward to making a difference.

Asked about the greatest challenges facing nurse practitioners, Mr Helms believes the sector is approaching a critical stage where its status within the health system needs to be strengthened. "I think that we are so busy as NPs working clinically that we're not able to get the publications out about what we're doing to actually improve the health of our communities that we work in.

"Our greatest challenge right now is getting our voice out there and showing people what we're actually doing."

On a personal note, Mr Helms said once his PhD is completed he will look to increase his clinical workload in private practice while also publishing relevant academic material surrounding the sector and its issues. "I actually think Australia, in some respects, is light years ahead of our North American colleagues with respect to the science of nurse practitioners. I think some of the greatest thought leaders and the theory behind our practice are actually based here."

## Tasmanian hospitals feeling the pressure

**The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF, Tasmanian Branch) is actively helping to address long-term infrastructure and workload issues at Tasmania's two biggest hospitals, the Launceston General Hospital and the Royal Hobart Hospital.**

The ANMF met with Launceston General Hospital's management after attending a crisis meeting called by nurses working in the Emergency Department (ED), in September.

The talks attempted to resolve critical issues confronting the department, specifically a lack of beds coupled with rising demand that is causing increasing pressures across the board. Measures such as developing an escalation policy and improved nurse-led criteria discharge were discussed.

ANMF Tasmanian Branch Secretary Neroli Ellis said patients were waiting at least two days to get a bed, with about 30 patients waiting for beds at any given time.

In one of the more drastic cases that helped trigger the latest emergency talk, nurses revealed a patient was forced to wait more than a week in the emergency room for a bed on a ward.

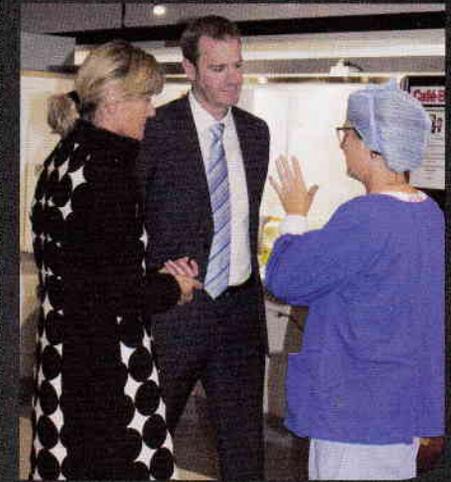
Ms Ellis blamed the situation on the closure of a 32-bed medical ward back in 2011 due to budget cuts. "The presentations are fairly stable now.

They've been increasing each year but they've stabilised. It's actually the acuity and the complexity of each presentation to the ED. There's an increasing trend of those patients."

Ms Ellis said the ANMF has had a positive relationship with the hospital, however cautioned that the proof would be in the pudding in achieving outcomes. "The budgets are incredibly tight and there is no additional funding, so clearly, we'll be taking that issue through to the Minister."

Ms Ellis said despite rising pressures, nurses remained resolute in their duty of care. "Clearly, these are not just nursing issues, but nurses end up having to cope with the pressures in the ED. The nurses are doing everything possible to provide quality care, but certainly in a pressure situation."

At the Royal Hobart Hospital, problems are similarly reaching boiling point, but for different reasons. The lack of permanently employed nurses at the hospital has resulted in a spike in the amount of double shifts undertaken



ANMF TASMANIAN BRANCH SECRETARY NEROLI ELLIS AND TASMANIAN HEALTH MINISTER MICHAEL FERGUSON CHAT WITH NURSE RICARDA BAKKER AT THE ROYAL HOBART HOSPITAL ABOUT IMPORTANT ISSUES.

by staff.

"This is becoming unsustainable. It's clearly exhausting and not in the best interests of the patients or the bottom line," Ms Ellis said.

The union met with nurse unit managers at the hospital and helped develop a range of strategies and solutions aimed at improving staffing. Consequently, management has agreed to employ an additional 26 nurses in the Emergency Department, along with an additional 40 full-time equivalents to join the Permanent Pool.