



Denis Blackford  
NT Branch Secretary

## IN THIS ISSUE:

Message from the Secretary	1
Organiser's Desk	2
News Briefs	3
Industrial Officer's Desk	4

### Contacting the Branch

When contacting the Branch for assistance or enquiry, it assists us greatly if you can provide us with your ANF NT membership number. This can be found on your membership card provided at the time joining the Branch and it is also on the ANJ front address sheet you receive each month.

### New Branch phone system

The ANF NT Branch have introduced a new digital phone system. The phone system is allowing greater efficiency in managing the many calls from members we receive each week.

The new system comes with voicemail options and a new Branch office phone number, so please call us on:

**(08) 8920 0700**

## MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY

Hello colleagues,

Welcome to the latest ANF NT newsletter.

Firstly, apologies to those of you who were expecting this to be included in last month's ANJ. Workloads and some leave intervened to prevent us meeting the publisher's deadline. Nevertheless we are back and trust that the following will engage and inform you on recent ANF NT Branch matters. The Branch has continued to be very busy with mounting member issues as well as other areas needing attention across the NT.

The ANF NT Branch has developed a 'Workloads Campaign', modelled on a Queensland Nurses Union (QNU, ANF Qld) concept from their recent EBA 5 campaign. The essence of this campaign is a tool that allows nurses to do something proactive to protect their duty of care responsibilities and avoid placing their professional registration at risk when confronted with unsafe workload environments. This campaign will be most effective in work areas where there is maximum support from nursing staff. The campaign was launched at Katherine District Hospital (KDH) in July (see Organiser's Desk) and Royal Darwin Hospital (RDH) nurses will be offered the concept later in the year. In adopting this concept in their workplace, nurses can, in a proactive way, indicate to their employer that they are not

going to accept working environments that have unsafe workloads.

In July I represented the Branch at the first NTPS Nurses Career Structure (NCS) Review day workshop (see details in this issue). This steering committee is tasked with producing a meaningful review of the NCS 2002 and address the many concerns raised by nurses since implementation. The NTPS Certified Agreement (CA) Taskforce has finally begun as well, on 5 July. As the CA was certified in February it is some months behind. This places the employer in technical breach of the agreement (more details to follow).

Branch membership continues to grow with there being a 14% increase in the past 12 months. This is seen to be a function of greater effective contact with nurses in more NT workplaces. Nurses, it seems are also more aware of the improved industrial capacity of the Branch in more effectively addressing workplace issues - and NT nurses are following the national trend of nurses seeking the assurance of union coverage in an increasingly challenging national nursing environment.

Until the next issue in October, I wish you all well and look forward to bringing more updates to you soon.

### Tax information - end of financial year

One of the extra benefits of ANF membership is that your union fees are tax deductible. When completing your tax return, don't forget to claim the total amount of your ANF union fees paid for the 2003/2004 financial year.

Unless being audited, or requested by your tax agent you do not need a written union fee receipt. To save costs, ANF only provides receipts upon request. If you pay your fees by credit card or direct debit you can obtain the information from your bank statements.

For information regarding expenses you can claim as a tax deduction contact the Australian Taxation Office at:  
[www.ato.com.au](http://www.ato.com.au)

### ANF NT Branch elections

As required under the ANF Federal Rules, the Branch is calling for nominations from financial members for all the positions on Branch Council and Branch Executive, excluding the Branch Secretary's position (this position is up for election this time next year).

The positions up for nomination are: Seven Branch Executive positions including President and Vice President and eight Branch Councillor positions.

At the time of writing, preparations for the calling for nominations are underway.

## From the branch office



### Organiser's Desk

Angela Phillips (nee Wallace)  
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### Aged care worksite visits

On visiting aged care worksites it is apparent that low nurse wages, combined with excessive workloads, are creating a staffing

crisis in the residential aged care sector. Nursing numbers employed in aged care in the NT have been on the decline for a number of years and this is unacceptable. It is also unacceptable that most aged care nurses are at least 22% behind in their wages compared to their colleagues working in the public sector.

Regrettably, even though some extra money was delivered in this year's Federal Budget, it is predicted that very little, if any, will filter through to aged care nurses' wages. Since the current Federal Governments deregulation of the aged care industry in 1997 we have seen soaring workloads, huge problems with nurse recruitment and retention and decreasing nursing hours for resident care. But this is not a facility problem - it is an industry problem. Nor is it just an NT problem it is a national problem and nursing staff just cannot maintain the workloads expected of them.

The recent ANF national aged care phone-in backs up what the nurses are saying, that they are poorly paid, over-worked, do not have sufficient time to care for residents, that there is a high turnover of staff, and, registered and enrolled nurse are being replaced by unlicensed staff.

The upcoming Federal Election could be your best chance to voice your concerns. It is time for all political parties to seriously look at the aged care problems. The ANJ in the lead up to the Federal Election will provide you with both the Federal government and opposition ministers positions on health and aged care. Take note and make sure you vote for someone who will provide a better future for aged care nurses.

A topical local example of the aged care crisis was the recent hearing in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission taken by the ANF against the Federal Government operated Hetti Perkins Nursing Home in Alice Springs. Disappointingly (though not surprisingly) the Commission read the Certified Agreement narrowly which had the effect of comprehensively altering rostering hours and further eroding RN hours. This was very disappointing for all involved, not least of all the residents.

The NT Branch will continue to work with the Federal ANF to address the aged care crisis and take a strong position on the key areas in which aged care nurses are affected.

### Workloads campaign

The Katherine District Hospital (KDH) Workloads Campaign was launched on 1 July. Job Delegate Joan Callister worked tirelessly to promote and distribute the Workloads Campaign pledge forms. Nearly two thirds of the nursing staff at KDH pledged their support for the campaign. The KDH Management also indicated support for the concept.

Unfortunately, a senior Health Department manager tried to stop the ANF launching the campaign on the hospital grounds. That demand was withdrawn after the ANF advised we would launch the campaign out the front of the hospital in the gutter (which would have made wonderful news headlines).

To date, the campaign at KDH appears to be demonstrating manageable workloads which is what we would expect at this time of year.

The ANF office and the job delegates (JDs) at Royal Darwin Hospital are preparing to reconsider the Workloads Campaign at RDH. JD's are commencing to map their worksites. Following this, pledge forms will be released to gauge whether staff are prepared to commit themselves to the campaign. Upon determining the 'pledge numbers' a decision will be made as to whether we can proceed.

### ANF Road Show

Throughout October the ANF will be hosting a Road Show at various worksites around the NT. There will be an information table and the ANF Organiser will be there to provide information, give away some merchandise, as well as offer some merchandise to purchase. A flyer promoting the Road Show will be distributed in early September.

#### Road Show Dates

Tennant Creek: 11 October 2004

Ti Tree: 12 October 2004

Alice Springs: 13-15 October 2004

Katherine Area: 21-22 October 2004

Darwin Private Hospital: 27 October 2004

Royal Darwin Hospital: 28 October 2004

Road Shows for the smaller worksites will be incorporated into the ANF worksite visits.

### Job delegate thank you

The ANF NT Branch office would like to thank the JDs who have assisted us with our mail outs and at the RDH Orientation Days. Your assistance and continued support is greatly appreciated.

## NTPS Certified Agreement (CA) Taskforce

The CA Taskforce finally got off to a shaky start at the beginning of July. Shaky because the DH&CS had not then appointed the final nurse N7 position. Notwithstanding this, ANF Project Officer Kirstie Hawkins and the DH&CS AO7 Project Officer Heather Traeger began what is a very large task in addressing some 40 areas from the CA.

The biggest project will be to look at the introduction of Nurse Practitioners in the NT. The Taskforce will be visiting key areas and stakeholders soon so look out for them in your area and contribute where you can. At the time writing the DH&CS had yet to identify an appointee to their Nurse Project Officer position.

## NTPS Nursing Career Structure Review: It's underway...

This very important and closely watched review of the NTPS Nursing Career Structure introduced in 2002 finally had its inaugural Steering Committee workshop on the 22 July. It was well attended by representatives of regions and work areas from across the NT. It was an opportunity for members of the committee to underscore quite clearly to the Principal Nurse Adviser, Greg Rickard, and other DH & CS representatives, who were not involved with the previous process, just how unhappy many nurses were with the process and many of the outcomes. NT nurses will be watching closely to ensure their aspirations are met this time. A communication process will be developed to pass on information to nurses across the NT. The ANF NT will endeavour to post regular updates on the Branch website and through this newsletter

## Remote electricity subsidy

The Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment (OCPE) has responded to some union concerns about the proposed changes to electricity subsidy arrangements for public sector employees. There is insufficient space to print the details here. Please contact the ANF NT Branch or the OCPE for details.

*Katherine District Hospital Paediatric Nurses*



*Australian Nursing Federation NT Branch Roadshow*

## Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII) - Registration requirements

Recent changes to NT legislation pertaining to nurses has meant that it is now a requirement of registration with the Health Professionals Licensing Authority (New version of the NT Nurses' Board) to indicate that nurses have adequate professional indemnity insurance (PII). ANF membership covers most nurses in employment with its PII cover. Nurses who work in some private contract arrangements earning more than \$20,000 per annum are not covered.

## Remote area update: Single nurse posts - ANF win

As many of you will be aware, the ANF NT has been successful in getting a commitment from the DH&CS to phase out the some 19 single nurse posts in remote communities across the NT. The process will begin this financial year with two central Australian communities to have extra nurses allocated to them and other communities to follow, according to the Minister. Appropriate accommodation infrastructure needs to be in place - among other issues. The Branch will be watching this process closely as it sure to produce implementation issues along the way.

## From the branch office



### Industrial Officer's Desk

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I have now been in this job one year, and what a quick one it has been. One thing that is clear is that many of my conversations commence with members asking

how to run a grievance. Grievances can be the most minor slight through to serious health-affecting issues. So what do you do when you believe you are battling a situation which is impacting (usually adversely) on your employment?

Keep in mind that it is common for all workplaces to have policies and procedures and they will colour how the individual responds to a grievance. Also, don't forget your Certified Agreement. Accordingly, ask either your human resource area or manager if you can have access to the grievance procedures/policies etc. Notwithstanding, the list as set out below ought to get you on track.

1. Don't let your problem get bigger and bigger, try and hit it on the head as soon as you start to feel there is an issue.
2. Are you able to speak to the person with whom the problem lays, if so there is much merit in trying to resolve it at this early stage?
3. If you are unable to deal directly with the person go to your supervisor. Reality dictates that on occasions your issue will be with your supervisor, if you feel you are no longer in a position to seek to resolve your problem at this level then seek to meet with the appropriate senior manager.
4. Keep on top of things, don't leave it weeks between approaches to people. Also at this point or at any point through this procedure you may want to seek out the union delegate in your area (ring us to see who this person is).
5. If you feel you are getting the run around and your efforts to resolve the matter informally are being ignored then put in writing to your director of nursing or appropriate body the subject of your complaint.
6. The clearest way to do this is to break the matter down into separate elements and to dot point those elements, eg., if your matter is a bullying complaint.
7. Start with an opening paragraph stating your name and position held and how long you have worked for the employer and in the particular area the subject of your complaint.
8. Then in next paragraph identify who the complaint is being made against and what that person's position is and their working relationship with you.
9. Then clearly state in dot point the conduct the subject of your complaint. When you do this try and be very clear about each point. In stating the conduct, try not to use emotive, rude or sarcastic language (tempting as it might be) as this can cloud and detract from the real issue.
10. Finish of your complaint by saying how all the aforementioned conduct has made you feel - this is where you set out your distress at the conduct, and any physical or psychological toll it may be having on you. End by asking for assistance in resolving the matters that are the subject of your complaint.
11. Before sending your letter *always keep a copy of your letter of complaint*. Where you have a HR department there is also merit in CC-ing a copy to your HR person.
12. In my view, the gravity of the issue ought to dictate how long before you can reasonably expect to receive a response. Expect more minor matters to take a little while, I consider 14 days to be reasonable. For more serious matters I would allow for a response time of between two and seven days.
13. If you receive no response in that time I would recommend one of two things: if you prefer to try and resolve the matter yourself, write a follow up letter asking for a response. However, I would recommend you contact the union at this point and we can fire off an email chasing the matter down.

If you are an employee of the Health Department you also have the opportunity to access the Employment Assistant Program (EAS) for three free sessions. I encourage you to ring them on 8941 1752 or 1800 193 123 and make an appointment to access their services.

The key to positively resolving a grievance is to move on the issue early. Letting things go in the vain hope that the matter will resolve itself rarely works and is the common denominator to many of the larger more distressing issues that come across my desk. I hope this summary goes some little way in helping you to consider your position and offer some hope that speaking up need not necessarily be a case of speaking out. Lastly, always remember as a union member you can approach us at anytime during the above process to seek our advice, checking your letter of complaint or intervention on your behalf.

I'll try and think of something more cheerful for my next article!!