

Tuesday 3 August 2010

RURAL NURSES SHOULD BE GIVEN SAME CONSIDERATION AS DOCTORS, RCNA SAYS

Coalition rural health workforce policies were welcomed today by Royal College of Nursing, *Australia* but it said that, compared with the generous rewards and incentives available to rural doctors, it was a fairly modest scheme.

Acting CEO, Kathleen McLaughlin said RCNA welcomed the Coalition's promise of an annual bonus of \$10,000 to nurse practitioners who practise in communities that don't have a resident doctor.

"This acknowledges the need for rural incentives for nurses but we are disappointed that it again reflects the misguided belief that nurse practitioners should only be rewarded if there is no doctor in the area.

"While a direct financial incentive to nurses is a sensible and welcomed retention strategy, it should be extended to include all nurse practitioners working in rural areas."

Ms McLaughlin said the Coalition's plan had some merit but on the whole, it provided narrow and limited solutions and had not considered the needs and concerns of the average nurse working in regional areas.

"Every effort must be made to allow rural nurses to get their nurse practitioner qualifications so they can provide their communities greater access to much needed health care.

"While the commitment of 100 new scholarship programs for rural nurses to pursue nurse practitioner qualifications is welcome news, simply covering the fees of university places is not enough to meet the typical cost burden associated with studying from a rural area. Costs such as travel and living costs associated with clinical placements for example can become relatively expensive.

"It is essential that the proposed new scholarships are designed with the complexities of living and working in rural areas in mind.

"To be effective the scholarships must provide enough financial support to make undertaking the intensive study program to become a nurse practitioner a real possibility for nurses from professionally isolated locations," she said.

Ms McLaughlin said the Coalition's plan acknowledged the need to promote and support the role of the nurse practitioner in rural communities, but this vision offered no solutions for the broader nursing and midwifery workforce.

"The average age of nurses in outer regional areas is just over 45. Every effort must be made to attract and retain nurses to these areas. "

Royal College of Nursing, *Australia* (RCNA) is Australia's peak professional nursing organisation and is the Australian member of the [International Council of Nurses](#). RCNA is a national [membership](#) organisation open to nurses and nursing students in all areas of the profession.