



15 April, 2011

Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee

PO Box 6100

Parliament House

CANBERRA QCT 2600

To The Members of the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee,

I have been invited by the Queensland Nurses' Union (QNU) to write a submission detailing my experience of the service I received from AHPRA for your committee to review. I probably need to start by telling you about myself so I can properly explain my situation. I began nursing in 2000 and continued working until the end of 2006, when I was pregnant with my first child. Between the end of 2006 and the start of 2010 I had a complete break from nursing and any paid work to have two children and stay at home to care for them.

The condition for re-registering every year with the Queensland Nursing Council (QNC) up until and including 2010 regarding minimum time worked was that nurses must have worked any amount of time in the previous 5 years, as long as they stayed current with education, etc. So at the start of last year, I thought I'd better start doing a few shifts to make sure I could say I had worked within the last 5 years when re-registering. I started doing about 1 shift a fortnight, which was a good work-life balance for me with 2 young children.

About August last year, I received a letter in the mail from Queensland Health, stating I needed to check the AHPRA website and make sure I knew what my new obligations were under the new scheme. Without that letter, provided by Queensland Health, not AHPRA, I wouldn't even have known that my obligations had changed.

I was shocked to read on the website that the conditions had now changed from only having to had worked some (any amount) of time in the previous 5 years, to having to had worked a minimum of 3 months' full time hours in the last 5 years, which I would need to complete by the time for re-registering in May 2011. After counting up the amount of shifts I had done in the last 4 years (with less than a year before the new conditions became enforced), I had only done about 18 shifts, and needed to do a further 42 to be able to fulfill the new requirement when re-registering this year.

I became quite upset, and felt that it was not fair to introduce this new requirement so quickly. With a nursing force made up mostly of women, surely I am not the only one to have taken time off in the last 5 years to have kids, and to now have to make up all these shifts within about 9 months to keep my registration. So I went from enjoying working once a fortnight to basically having to commit to working at least 1 shift a week, which may not seem like a lot, but it did put pressure on my work-life balance. This was especially true when I had to work mostly weekends so my husband could look after the kids, and therefore meant we had little time to spend together as a family. It has also been hard, as I am casual, because I am not guaranteed any amount of shifts, and have not often been booked in advance, so it has been difficult to plan things, and felt very pressured to try to get shifts. I really feel that when introducing the new requirements, they should have stated that in the next 5 years we must do a minimum of 3 months' full-time hours, not that by the time you re-register next year, you must have done a minimum of 3 months' full-time hours in the last 5 years.

So I started to try to make enquiries about what was classed as full-time hours, was there any way of getting some leeway with the new requirement, etc. I made many calls to AHPRA, and I got so frustrated and upset I was in tears on several occasions, and spent a very long time on the phone. When I called, I would be redirected to several people, who were not the right ones to speak to, and the right ones to speak to were never there or available. No-one knew the answer to my question about the new requirement and whether there was any leeway. Often there would be no-one available from the Queensland office, so I would have to speak to someone in another state; but it really didn't matter as nobody knew anything about it. I had to hang up several times while being redirected, because I was left to wait on hold for long periods of time ie. greater than 10 minutes. By chance I got redirected to one lady, who was at least sympathetic to my cause, and I was able to get her direct line number. She promised to try to find out the answer, and I had to ring her back in 2 weeks. When I did, she had tried to find out the answer, but couldn't find anyone who knew, and the best suggestion she had was to put my request for information in writing and hope for an answer.

I also tried to deal with people at the QNU, to try to get them to investigate an answer for some of my questions about the new requirements, and they also were completely uninformed about everything, and I could not find anyone who knew anything. I was basically told they had more pressing matters to deal with. In the end, I realised that it was all too difficult, that I was wasting my time trying to deal with AHPRA or QNU, and have knuckled down and just got the hours done, making me feeling pressured to do shifts I did not want or need, and leaving me exhausted.

I feel the whole new Board was completely disorganised. They should have let everyone know of the new conditions, explaining them thoroughly, to workers, Unions, and most importantly, their own staff. They did not have people easily accessible to talk to that could answer questions easily and quickly. And the whole phone system is useless; I was just being transferred around to a whole lot of different people, even across states, and I would have to repeat my whole story again, only to be told they didn't have a clue.

I hope you can address some of these issues with them. I tried to re-register online today with the email they sent me, which did not work because of some kind of error, so I am dreading having to call them next week to see if I can sort it out over the phone.

Thank you for hearing of my experiences and for caring about making changes. I would love to have a copy of any findings, reports or changes you make, if at all possible.

Yours sincerely,

