NEW SOUTH WALES NURSES' ASSOCIATION

GUIDELINES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF 12 HOUR SHIFTS

PREAMBLE
In response to a number of requests from members for increased flexibility in roster systems, including the ability to work 12 hour shifts, the Association introduced a provision into the Public Hospital Nurses' (State) Award to allow more flexible systems to be trialed in controlled circumstances.

While recognising the desire of members for more flexible roster systems than are available under the current award provisions any relaxation of the award restrictions on hours of work needs to be carefully balanced against the occupational health and safety implications of shift work, the implications for quality of patient care, the potential for discrimination against groups within the nursing population and the need to maintain a choice in hours of work which will suit the varying needs of the Association's membership.

For these reasons flexible roster systems which do not comply with current award restrictions should only be introduced in circumstances where all those factors can be safeguarded.

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY
The NSW Nurses' Association is committed to ensuring the health and safety of its members and preventing the loss of nurses from the profession due to work related injury and illness.

There is a growing body of literature on the health effects of shiftwork, extended hours of work and fatigue. Many of the conditions set out below, e.g. the restriction on overtime, are protections based on the recommendations arising from this research.

AWARD PRESCRIPTIONS
The Public Hospital Nurses' (State) Award contains restrictions on shift lengths that would prohibit 12 hour shifts. The only exception to this prohibition are 12 hour shift systems which are introduced under the provisions of Clause 5 Pilot Roster Projects.
Clause 5 provides for trialing flexible roster practices or 12 hour shifts with the agreement of the NSW Nurses' Association. The terms of the agreement must include:

1. The duration of the project;
2. The conditions of the project;
3. The award provisions required to be overridden in order to implement the project;
4. The review mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of the project,

Prior to approving the implementation the Association requires a number of matters to be included in the terms of the project.

**CONSULTATION and AGREEMENT**
Before approval will be given the Association must ensure that there has been consultation with the nursing staff affected. The Association requires that no staff can be compelled to agree to work 12 hour shifts. Alternative shift provisions must remain available for those staff who do not agree to participate in the 12 hour project.

**ROSTER SPAN**
The Association recommends that the ordinary hours of work be balanced over a six week period of 19 x 12 hour shifts and 23 rostered days off for a total of 228 ordinary hours. This method of balancing ordinary hours maximises the number of rostered days off and does not require a shorter shift in the roster cycle to balance the ordinary hours.

**PAYMENT FOR ORDINARY HOURS**
It is recommended that ordinary hours are paid on the basis of 76 hours pay per fortnight to equalise pay over the 6 week roster period.

**SPAN OF SHIFT**
Where possible the span of the shift should be 12 hours inclusive of meal breaks. Where a handover period of 30 minutes is required the span should be limited to 12.5 hours.

**MINIMUM BREAK BETWEEN SHIFTS**
The minimum break between shifts should be 11.5 hours.

**CONSECUTIVE SHIFTS**
The maximum number of consecutive night shifts should be limited to three.

**ROSTERED DAYS OFF**
Employees shall not be rostered on single days off unless it is at the request of the employee.
OVERTIME
The Association requires a prohibition on overtime in conjunction with a 12 hour shift.

MEAL AND REST BREAKS
Additional meal and rest breaks should be allowed. For example, where the shift span is 12.5 hours rest breaks could be arranged as follows:

Day shift 1 half hour unpaid meal break
           2 x 20 minute paid tea breaks

Night shift 1 half hour unpaid meal break
            2 x 30 minute paid tea breaks

REPLACEMENT OF STAFF
Any 12 hour shift being replaced by either casual or agency staff must cover the full span of the shift.

LENGTH OF AGREEMENT
The initial project should have a term of six months to allow for early evaluation of the project.

VARIATION OF TERMS
The parties should have the right to vary the terms of the agreement by consent during the life of the agreement.

WITHDRAWAL FROM PROJECT
Any individual should have the right to withdraw from the 12 hour shift system with two weeks notice.

Either party to the agreement should have the right to terminate the agreement during its nominated term with one months notice should the project result in a risk to patient care or the occupational health and safety of the staff.

QUALITY REVIEW PROCESS
A quality review process must be established as part of the project. The indicators to be used should include staff satisfaction, sick leave, medication errors, critical incidents, injuries to staff, journey injuries to staff, fatigue levels, use of agency staff and overtime.

Base line data must be established prior to the commencement of the project. Staff satisfaction surveys should be carried out at six weeks, three months and six months into the 12 hour project.

Copies of all reports must be provided to the Association as an essential part of the monitoring process.