

## **Response to Productivity Commission Draft Report January 2011**

**By Joanne Bryant**

While the sheer size of the Commissions draft report validates the academic process of compiling the publication it does little to address the miserable conditions that patients, clients and staff find themselves in everyday all over Australia.

I accept that aged care has become a complex problem and that the Commission had confines to work within. But the simple truth is that aged care is now aged non-care. Use of the words transparency, accountability and disclosure make great rhetoric but will never translate into addressing the concerns of malnutrition, dehydration, over medicating and abuse, that have reached epidemic proportions across all aged care sectors. Until the words malnourished, dehydrated, neglect, and abuse replace words such as transparency, implementation pathway, and accountability we cannot have an honest authentic debate.

The issue of staffing is pivotal to providing quality care to our frail citizens. Staffing levels were glossed over in the report with a few irrelevant statistics added. While the report acknowledges staffing discrepancies the discussion that follows appears useless in addressing the issue.

Too few staff, underpaid staff, unskilled staff equates to patients going hungry, thirsty and lying in their own waste.

Greed based management is the only reason we have a staff shortage. I myself am one of many nurses who would love to work in aged care, but the neglect that is encouraged by numerous facilities is too hard to bear.

More regulatory bodies will continue to choke the genuine compassionate providers and encourage the rest to become more underhanded.

It is reassuring to see palliative care is included in the debate. This specialty area is badly neglected and many end of life experiences are traumatizing for patients family and staff.

Box 13.6 lists six research centres with a focus on aging, and yet the draft recommends more research. Would it not be more prudent to consider an educational facility that trains specialist aged care staff? Bringing economists, epidemiologists, psychologists or any other out of touch academics onto the payroll will not help toilet, feed or support our patients.

Improved funding is mentioned frequently. As most aged care providers are in it for the money, they must be rubbing their hand together with glee. Dangling the more money carrot means more manipulation to improve the return of their investment.

I applaud those submissions that are written from the heart, and I make no excuse for attempting to humanise this debate. I suggest the commissioners themselves give up a lunch break and leave their plush offices to go the nearest aged care facility and feed

lunch to someone who cannot feed themselves, or toilet someone who needs assistance. Now that would be doing a humane tangible service, because I am far from convinced that this ongoing commission will contribute anything to the sadness that is our current aged non- care.

Joanne Bryant