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OPINION PIECE

2 July, 2009

TANGLED IN A WEB OF RED TAPE

Tangled, twisted and tied in an endless supply of bureaucratic red tape, aged and frail Australians are paying the ultimate price for Minister for Ageing Justine Elliot's beloved bureaucracy. The Productivity Commission recently handed down a report slamming the Rudd Government for preventing aged care nurses from undertaking their primary job – delivering world-class care to aged and frail Australians – because of excessive bureaucracy and red tape. The facts are clear, the conclusions indisputable, we have a Minister for Ageing who is actively working against delivering world-class aged care to aged and frail Australians.

The Productivity Commission report found that:

“The aged care industry is characterised by centralised planning processes which result in a heavy regulatory burden on aged care providers.”

While Minister Elliot claims that her passion for red tape and regulation are working to protect aged and frail Australians, evidence is irrefutably to the contrary. Aged Care Australia recently reported that the number of notices of non-compliance issued by Minister Elliot had increased by 100% over the past year, from 75 to 148; and the number of sanctions increased by 100% from 15 to 29. If you are from the states of Victoria or New South Wales the increase in sanctions and notices of non-compliance make the national average of 100% seem insignificant.

Undoubtedly the focus of all aged care stakeholders must be on providing world-class care to aged and frail Australians, and those facilities not providing the appropriate level of care should be penalised. However the Minister must realise that her poorly constructed policies do little more than take nurses away from the bedside and plant them behind desks to fill out forms – directly resulting in reduced levels of care.

The Minister is so out of touch with the industry she is empowered to support that she cannot fathom how aged and frail Australians are paying the ultimate price for her actions. Minister Elliot continues to pedal her two second sound-byte, “I *make no apologies for taking a tough stance against poor service*”. But what the Minister needs to apologise for is creating an aged care system that is so tangled, twisted

and tied in bureaucratic red tape that aged care nurses are spending more and more time behind a desk ticking boxes and less time at the bedside caring for our loved ones.

I have had the privilege of meeting many of our aged care nurses and you cannot help but be in awe of their passion and devotion for providing world-class care for those in their final years. Nurses are drastically underpaid and in most parts of the country, drastically over-worked. To submit these highly trained professionals to unprecedented levels of regulation is a slap in the face.

Caring for our loved ones is what nurses do best. If we are serious about ensuring aged and frail Australians get the very best in care, we must ensure they spend as much time as possible at the bedside and away from the desk.

Aged care in Australia is in dire need of reform. We must be committed to ensuring that aged and frail Australians receive nothing but the best in care. Minister for Ageing, Justine Elliot, must throw away her beloved red tape and start concentrating on implementing measures that will ensure Australia meets the aged care needs of an ageing population to guarantee our loved ones receive world-class care, in world-class aged care facilities.

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