

NEWS

Nurses' quit threat

Brigid O'Connell and Nick Higginbottom

440 words

6 October 2008

[Herald-Sun](#)

1 - FIRST

10

English

Copyright 2008 News Ltd. All Rights Reserved

NURSES have warned that new abortion laws could professionally and morally compromise Victorian staff and prompt an exodus to the aged care sector.

Bioethicist and registered nurse Jo Grainger said the laws would take away a nurse's right to object to assisting a pregnancy termination up to 24 weeks during an "emergency abortion".

"If a surgical nurse is asked by a doctor to assist -- and it can be any doctor, not necessarily an obstetrician -- they are compelled to under the new laws," she said.

A letter from Health Minister Daniel Andrews to the Australian Nursing Federation confirms that nurses in operating theatres would not be covered by the Bill's "conscientious objection" clause.

Mr Andrews said the clause only applies to nurses "providing direct services to women", such as a nurse practitioner.

"The purpose of the clause (is to) . . . make it clear that where such an objection is held, that certain duties to the woman still apply, these being to disclose the belief and make an effective referral, and to act in an emergency despite the conscientious belief," he says.

But nurse Justine Armstrong, who has put her registration renewal on hold pending the outcome of the legislation, said surgical nurses could oppose abortion on numerous grounds.

"I've had a miscarriage so it would be double trauma for me to participate in an abortion," she said.

Kate, a government secondary school nurse who did not want to be identified, said while she could not give students Panadol, she would be allowed -- and possibly compelled -- to give students abortion drugs.

"My concern is that because I'm at a government school that I'll be asked to do the course to administer abortion drugs, but I'd rather walk out of my job than give that drug to 13 or 14-year-olds," she said.

Archbishop Denis Hart and state MPs were among thousands of people who protested against the Brumby Government's Abortion Law Reform Bill yesterday.

A packed St Patrick's Cathedral prayed for the defeat of the legislation, which was to be debated in the Upper House from tomorrow.

Archbishop Hart hoped Upper House MPs would vote against the Bill, which "makes a mockery of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act".

“The Bill is a strident challenge to our freedom to hold and exercise fundamental religious beliefs,” he said.

Thousands of opponents to the legislation rallied on the steps of Parliament and spilled on to Spring St, which police had to partially close to traffic.