

**HEALTH SERVICES AMENDMENT (PARAMEDICS) BILL 2015**

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**Bill introduced on motion by Mrs Jillian Skinner, read a first time and printed.****Second Reading****Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER** (North Shore—Minister for Health) [4.15 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to bring before the House the Health Services Amendment (Paramedics) Bill 2015. The bill proposes to amend the Health Services Act 1997 to restrict use of the title "paramedic" and to make it an offence for any person to use the title of "paramedic" if they do not hold the required qualifications. The required qualifications will be set out in regulations under the legislation.

Paramedics are highly skilled health professionals who provide emergency health services to injured and sick people. Paramedics work with a wide range of patients—from those with low acuity to those in primary care through to advanced life support and intensive care. Their patients cover a life span—from birth, to paediatrics, to geriatrics. They perform complex health procedures and interventions, including emergency medical assessment; lifesaving resuscitation and defibrillation; the administration of drugs of addiction, such as morphine; manage complex burns or spinal injuries and they do so in challenging or uncontrolled settings.

Paramedics are often at the front line, saving lives and ensuring patients are treated and managed appropriately until the patient can be transported to hospital. It can be highly stressful and, unfortunately, sometimes dangerous work. Members will agree with me when I express my gratitude for the work that paramedics do in our society. It is no surprise that of all the professions, paramedics rate most highly in the community. Paramedics can be contrasted with individuals providing first aid services.

First-aiders provide a wonderful service to our community and many do so voluntarily. They are found on our sports fields and at community events assisting members of our communities. All members can agree that our communities benefit from their hard work, dedication and community spirit. There is an effective range of measures in place in New South Wales to regulate paramedics and ensure the protection of the public from unsafe practices. For example, the vast majority of paramedics in New South Wales are employees of the Ambulance Service of NSW and are subject to employment conditions of the service and the NSW Health Code of Conduct.

The possession and administration of drugs by paramedics is regulated under the New South Wales Poisons and Therapeutics Goods legislation. Paramedics in New South Wales are also subject to the Code of Conduct for Unregistered Health Professionals in New South Wales, which sets out a number of important ethical standards for unregistered health practitioners such as practising in a safe and ethical manner, adopting standard precautions for infection control, not practising under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and not engaging in a sexual relationship with a client. Breaches of the Code of Conduct for Unregistered Health Practitioners can be investigated by the Health Care Complaints Commission, which has the power to make a prohibition order in respect of serious breaches of the code. Any person can make a complaint in respect of alleged breaches of the code.

However, there is one gap in the regulation of paramedics. Currently any person can call themselves a paramedic in New South Wales regardless of their level of qualifications and training. It can also be difficult for the public to distinguish between highly trained and skilled paramedics and other

important, but more routine, first aider and first responder roles. We need to recognise the high degree of education, training and/or experience required of paramedics. This education and training ensures that paramedics can perform the tasks necessary to treat patients in need of urgent, and often lifesaving, treatment. By protecting the use of the title "paramedic", members of the public can be sure that those who call themselves a paramedic have the necessary qualifications, training or experience.

Paramedics are generally required to hold a university degree or vocational diploma relating to paramedical science. It often takes three years or more of study and on-the-job training to be recognised as a paramedic. It is a long hard slog. While the existing range of regulations covering paramedics is effective, it is time to protect the title "paramedic" and give the community assurance that only those people with the appropriate qualifications, training or experience can call themselves a paramedic.

I am pleased to bring the Health Services Amendment (Paramedics) Bill before the House. This bill will amend the Health Services Act to make it an offence for a person who is not a paramedic to hold themselves out to be a paramedic. A paramedic is defined in the bill to include a person who has the qualifications, training or experience prescribed by the regulations; a person authorised under the law of another jurisdiction to call themselves a paramedic; or a person authorised by the Health Secretary to hold themselves out to be a paramedic.

The Ambulance Service of New South Wales employs around 3,400 paramedics, the majority of all paramedics in New South Wales, to help the sick and injured in our community. The Ambulance Service of New South Wales requires its paramedics to either have an appropriate university course in paramedical health science or undertake an on-the-job vocational diploma, which takes around three years.

The Ambulance Service of New South Wales provides an example of what the public should expect from any paramedic in New South Wales. A large number of university courses across New South Wales and Australia offer a degree in paramedical science. In addition, the vocational training course offered by the Ambulance Service of New South Wales has the necessary educational and training requirements for paramedics—these courses will be listed in the regulations.

I also recognise that there may be a number of persons who may have been working as a paramedic for many years but who will not hold the necessary qualifications, training or experience set out in the regulations and that will be required of persons calling themselves a paramedic going forward. However, their work as a paramedic should not be disregarded—in the same way as we make transitions in the training mechanism for any other health profession or otherwise. The bill will allow the Health Secretary to authorise a person to call himself or herself a paramedic. Grandparenting arrangements are appropriate, as this will be the first time that the title "paramedic" is protected.

Paramedics in New South Wales are among the best in the world. It requires intense study and training to be a paramedic. That training and expertise allows paramedics to be authorised to supply and administer drugs of addiction such as morphine, to treat severe trauma and undertake complex medical procedures in emergencies, including manual defibrillation, managing labour or delivering a baby, and treating heart attacks. Therefore it is right that only those with the appropriate qualifications, training and experience will be able to call themselves a paramedic. Protection of the title "paramedic" complements the existing range of regulations in New South Wales in respect of paramedics and will ensure that the community can have confidence that someone who calls themselves a paramedic is appropriately qualified and trained.

The NSW Ministry of Health has consulted with a range of stakeholders and they are all supportive of

protection of the paramedic title, including the Ambulance Service of New South Wales, Australasian Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians, Paramedics Australasia, Private Paramedicine Australia, Australian Emergency Care Providers, Australian and New Zealand College of Paramedicine, Health Services Union, Australian Paramedics Association, Safety Australia, Paramedical Services, St John Ambulance New South Wales, and Lieutenant Colonel Dominic Wade, Joint Health Command, Vice Chief of the Defence Force Group.

The Ministry will continue to consult with stakeholders on regulations to support the bill.

Under this bill New South Wales will join Tasmania and South Australia. Those States have also decided that the use of the title "paramedic" should be restricted to those with the necessary qualifications and training. This bill is a vote of confidence in the clinical capabilities of our State's paramedics and an acknowledgement of the life-saving role they play in providing critical and emergency care. Their expertise is second to none and I am pleased that the Government is acting to ensure the critical role they play in the health system is protected. The bill acknowledges the high level of qualifications paramedics need to provide critical and emergency care and the essential role they play in the New South Wales health system. It will also ensure that people who do not meet those qualifications cannot call themselves a paramedic. I commend this bill to the House.

**Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Greg Warren and set down as an order of the day for a future day.**