

7 December 2016

Ms Elspeth Dyer
Committee Manager
Committee on Law and Safety
Legislative Assembly
Parliament of NSW
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Ms Dyer

Inquiry into Inquiry into Violence Against Emergency Services Personnel

Thank you for your invitation to provide further information regarding the issues raised at my latest attendance before the committee.

Q1. At the Committee's public hearing on 14 November, the Secretary of the APA stated that without significant changes in infrastructure and resources, it is unlikely significant changes can be made to the duress system for NSW paramedics (see p.58). Does the HSU consider significant improvements to the duress system to be possible using current infrastructure? Does it need to be replaced?

A We broadly agree with this statement, however duress alarms are a bit more complicated than that. There are two duress systems available to paramedics: one is by the radio and the other by the MDT. There are currently no plans to increase or improve this as to do so would require more resources. Both require either radio or 3G/4G/Mobitex network coverage to work.

Q2. The Committee understands that there are radio 'black spots' in some areas of the State. Given paramedic reliance on radio coverage to communicate duress, including coverage for portable radios, does the HSU have concerns regarding radio 'black spots'?

A. There are radio black spots where there is no radio and/or data (3G/4G/Mobitex) coverage. Obviously they are mostly in western NSW. To fix these black spots would require significant capital expenditure by the NSW Ambulance, NSW Telecommunications Authority and/or the telco companies (Telstra and Optus). NSW Ambulance has no money, the Telecommunications Authority probably couldn't do anything quickly and action by Telstra/Optus is based on financial considerations.

Q3. The APA has raised issues concerning NSW Ambulance's vehicle location system. At a public hearing on 14 November, the APA Secretary told the Committee: "...we have issues where police have been unable to attend because of our vehicle location systems: they do not know where we are"



Health Services Union
ABN 850 3775 1682

Sydney Office
Level 2 - 109 Pitt Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Postal Address
Locked Bag 3
Australia Square
NSW 1215

Tel: 1300 478 679
Fax: 1300 329 478
Web: www.hsu.asn.au
E-mail: info@hsu.asn.au

(see p.59). Does the Health Services Union have any concerns about NSW Ambulance's vehicle location system?

- A. Of course the HSU has concerns about the Ambulance Vehicle Location System. The Sydney Metro equipment is 12 to 15 years old and replacement parts are hard to obtain. They are well beyond their design life so of course they will become less reliable.

Q4. Does the Health Services Union have any concerns about the ability of NSW Ambulance Control Centres to respond to violent incidents in a timely way?

- A. Yes, the HSU should be concerned if the control centres cannot quickly and accurately locate paramedics in duress. The situation whereby we could not locate a paramedic in duress did not happen very often in my experience. I cannot remember an instance.

Q5. Does the Health Services Union have any concerns about testing and review by NSW Ambulance of its duress systems and responses following an activation?

5. It is difficult for us to determine the efficacy of the testing and review. Our expectation is that testing be regular and held against tight bench marks. One of our concerns is that these benchmarks are based, in some cases on out of date technology.

In response to the issue raised by Mr Damien Tudehope, regarding disciplinary proceedings arising from an event, I undertook to provide information about a matter the union is pursuing in the Industrial Relations Commission.

This matter, number [REDACTED], is an application for relief from victimisation under section 213 of the Industrial Relations Act 1996 (NSW). The application alleges that a paramedic who is a delegate, of the HSU has suffered victimisation because of his union activity. Relevantly, a question about a clinical response arose with respect to this paramedic and was referred to the Professional Standards and Conduct Unit for investigation into alleged misconduct. The HSU understands there was no adverse patient outcome associated with this matter.

The HSU sees this as a punitive response to a situation that warranted a clinical review. Whilst there are particular circumstances that lead the union to the view that this matter was a case of victimisation, we believe that this is part of a broader trend of relying on disciplinary processes for dealing with clinical enquiries, and framing as misconduct incidents that are more properly dealt with through clinical mentoring and support.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Gerard Hayes

Secretary.