

**Submission  
No 11**

## **INQUIRY INTO VIOLENCE AGAINST EMERGENCY SERVICES PERSONNEL**

**Organisation:** Western NSW Local Health District  
**Name:** Mr Scott McLachlan  
**Position:** Chief Executive  
**Date Received:** 5 July 2016



Mr Geoff Provest MP Chair  
Committee on Law and Safety  
Violence Against Emergency Services personnel  
Parliament of NSW South Wales  
Macquarie Street,  
Sydney NSW 2000  
[lawsafety@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:lawsafety@parliament.nsw.gov.au)

Dear Mr Provest

**Re: Inquiry into Violence Against Emergency Services Personnel**

I am writing in response to your letter dated 18 May 2016 (our ref D16/5305), inviting Western NSW Local Health District (WNSWLHD) to provide a response to the Inquiry into Violence against Emergency Services Personnel in NSW. This response provides information on the types of services provided by Western NSW Local Health District within Western and remote NSW and gives examples of some of the types of incidents and violence against health professionals within WNSWLHD.

WNSWLHD has more than 40 Health Service sites, geographically located throughout the central west of NSW. These facilities offer an extensive range of services including mental health, dental, allied health, public health, Aboriginal health and multipurpose health services.

Violence and aggression does occur within Health across WNSWLHD with periodic episodes of violence and aggression against staff by persons presenting to our facilities. In particular, our Inpatient Emergency Departments and waiting room areas are the main areas affected.

Historically, and most notably, was the horrific rape and murder of Nurse Sandra Hoare at Walgett Hospital on the 9 December 1994 and most recently the fatal stabbing of a Nurse Bob Fenwick at Bloomfield Hospital Orange NSW, by a psychiatric inpatient in 2011.

Because our Health Services cover a large number of remote areas of NSW, concerns arise in the instance of aggression of persons presenting, being the lack of local Police presence and response. In some of our townships, due to the distance between towns, there is a lack of 24 hour policing being available.

A large number of our remote Health Sites do not have onsite security or the availability of private security as a resource. Mostly, they rely on police attending from other towns (which could be up to 1 to 2 hours away). In some of these remote towns, some Health Services have arrangements with local State Emergency Services or Rural Fire Service being called to assist in any aggressive or hostile duress situations where Police are not easily available.

WNSWLHD takes security & safety concerns seriously and has put systems in to place along with technology such as personnel duress alarms. These are mainly used for specific staff working in isolation and as determined by local risk assessments, within each ward and department. Other

supporting technology within WNSWLHD Services, are Closed Circuit TV (CCTV) in all essential points throughout each Health Service.

A program of new recruitment initiatives has been run for licensed Health Security Assistants to help them manage violent and aggressive persons presenting to our Health Services. This program is ongoing, but is proving to be a difficult exercise due to the lack of licensed security operatives and persons wishing to obtain such qualifications within remote communities.

Often drugs of addiction and alcohol are the main causes of the volatile and aggressive behaviour displayed by some patients presenting to the In-Patient Emergency Departments, which can then turn the areas in to high risk, hostile areas for other patients, visitors and staff.

Violence and aggressive behaviour by patients presenting to our Health Services is not unique to WNSWLHD. In fact, it affects many health services across the state. As WNSWLHD is familiar with the issues surrounding violence and aggressive behaviour by patients, I support any improvements to legislation and current sentencing options for persons assaulting Emergency Services workers during the course of their duty. WNSWLHD Board and myself look forward to the final outcome from this inquiry.

Should you require any further information in this matter please contact Jeff Morrissey, Director Corporate Services on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Scott McLachlan  
**Chief Executive**

Cc: [REDACTED]

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