

Submission
No 83

**THE MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS OF THE NSW
AMBULANCE SERVICE**

Name: Suppressed
Date received: 25/06/2008

Partially Confidential

[First 10 pages omitted by secretariat to maintain confidentiality, as requested by author, and to remove adverse mention]

I went to Sydney and had a meeting with John MacDonald from Proactive Resolutions. The Ambulance Service had organized his company to look into what led up to the Stations problems so the Ambulance Service could try and avoid similar problems in the future, a seen to be doing the right thing is what I call it.

It was a great meeting. John MacDonald is an incredibly decent intelligent man. Contact with him was extremely positive. We were to meet again in the next few weeks after his return from overseas.

Straight after our meeting, he had a meeting with Greg Rochford and Michael Willis to present his findings. That's a few years ago now and I haven't heard from John McDonald since. He must have told Greg Rochford and Michael Willis something they didn't want to hear. Hey, but they do have it on record that they had hired Proactive Resolutions to help. This needs follow up. What did John Macdonald have to report?

I have tried to move on. I left the Ambulance Service after years of service. I could not work under the false facade that the Service holds up with its pathetic management styles and poor decisions and cover ups. I have avoided going public also as I see it as a tit for tat type of thing. That's how I see this enquiry also. I don't believe that the truth will come out. The whole thing is like something that you see in a movie. I can't help but believe that has something over the Service.

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I would like to tell the Enquiry some of my beliefs as to why Ambulance Officers are highly strung, depressed, have social issues, or think they are something they are not;

I have worked in Newcastle, Sydney and the bush. I'll start with the bush. All I wanted to be from the beginning was a country Ambo. Have some land and some animals. Wrong move if you work for the Ambulance Service.

Firstly, a lot of Ambo's don't want to be in the bush so they just work hard on getting out. This often offends the local Ambo's who think that these people think that they are too good for the town.

Often the Ambo's that have been in the country town for a while have become rusty with their skills. Something they strongly disagree with. Don't get me wrong, a lot are first class. New Ambo's sent to the bush have had the latest teachings and are often more clinically capable than the long serving Ambo's. Or, they are keener, and have the attitude to do well, I think it's the keenness and the attitude that rubs the older country Ambo's up the wrong way.

Most of the staff for example had grown up in the town, or had been there for many many years. The one thing I noticed was that they acted as if they owned the town and the Ambulance Station. This worried me but I was able to deal with it. The one thing I hated was being ridiculed for doing my job properly. I dealt with that also. Other Ambo's like couldn't deal with it. And nor should have too.

But then again, Ambulance work is not what I would call a normal job. It has a high toll on people's personal lives and relationships. Good people in the job can be seriously affected. Most people state they couldn't do the job, that's why it is the most trusted profession, the average person thinks that Ambo's are a special bunch due to the nature of their work; it is therefore easy for to slip in under the radar and do their stuff. The Ambulance Service Management treats Ambos like they are doing some basic meaningless job and gloat on the public perception.

I have mentioned in writing about the pack mentality at . Whilst I did handle it, I did feel outcast by it. I can now though, probably understand how it develops; One must stop and think of the lives that local country Ambo's have at times. Most jobs they attend they know the patient. The Ambo's at have attended absolutely countless horrific tragic circumstances to patients that they have grown up with, gone to school with, played sport with, drank at the pub with, etc. They have to deal with that somehow and that's where I think the pack mentality comes into it. They stick together to deal with it. Like a coping mechanism. It becomes a bond that I don't think they even realize the intensity of. They will bag each other out behind each others backs, some may not even particularly like each other, but never the less, the bond stays. I guarantee, if you had them all in a room together and started talking about this issue in particular; the tears would not stop flowing.

I don't believe that they have this problem in the major centres like Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong, not to this extent anyway.

To my knowledge, there is virtually no counselling. Sure there is some available if you want to persue it. But most Ambo's are the worlds greatest deniers and wont show weakness. They are meant to be the pillars in their towns and are able to handle anything. They refuse to buckle or show emotions. But the glass is slowly filling up.

Compulsory counseling should be regularly provided by the service. Not the self serve system they have now. And not by the peer support system they have at present which most Ambo's don't use, or feel uncomfortable about using

One thing is certain, if you start in the Ambulance Service with mental issues or disorders, one had better hope that the medication works because it will be all down hill from there. It is not the job for mentally ill people. God knows that a lot of mental issues develop within the job just due to the nature of the job.

Ambo's can be a nasty bunch at times. It's an extremely competitive career, rewarding career, and soul destroying career. A lot of Ambo's think that they are far superior in clinical skills than others. That's when the knife goes in. A lot of Ambo's won't share their knowledge and skills in fear someone will end up better than them. But at a big job everything usually goes well which is what the public see, and then the knives come out again after.

There should always be a debrief after any significant job, but instead there is another job that you are immediately sent too, and another and so on.

A lot can be learnt from the Management techniques of Keith Williams in the Ambulance Service. Here is a Manager that knows his stuff, doesn't bow to the clicks and gets on with the job. His style is what the other Managers within the Service should follow. He is not a push over, is quite hard at times, has the skills, consistency and the job in focus and most importantly his staff in focus. He has rebuilt the Rescue side of the Ambulance Service, while the whole time the Service has tried to dissolve it, and will continue to try and dissolve it. This Parliamentary Enquiry could learn a lot from this Ambulance Service Manager.

Other problems exist due to elitism and clicks. The Service is good at keeping this alive. I believe the Paramedic system has run the Ambulance Service for years, Management bow to them. There is not enough skill mixing. Often in Sydney you have two basic Ambo's in one car and two clinically advanced Ambo's in another. I've heard basic Ambo's in Sydney complain about not getting enough experience because the 'Frogs' (paramedics) turn up and we get told to get out of it. Skill mixing will help fix this. I must say that in Newcastle the Frogs wouldn't kick you aside but would want you to stay involved in the treatment.

Trainee Ambulance Officers are often trained by Ambulance officers who have only just completed their own training. Trainees should be trained by clinically advanced and experienced Ambulance Officers. Instead, they are a bum on a seat.

I understand that the Service does need teams that are of the highest standard to be strategically located, but as for the rest it could be managed a lot better.

Rosters are a major problem. The rosters have been too one sided in the past. There has been no work/life balance. Mix with this, lengthy periods of relief work away from home, and you can end up with some sad Ambo's. The Western Area has been grossly understaffed and Ambo's are trying hard to fill in the gaps. There are issues with the permanent Ambo's not allowing the relief staff to do on call in some instances. This can create serious problems. Sure, at times mistakes are made and some Ambo's get call outs

when they should have been someone else's. It has happened to every ambo at some stage.

Some Ambo's have taken advantage of reduced numbers and are earning large amounts of money and getting no rest. Often, these Ambo's are against reducing the work load on the rosters because they have an expensive life style and huge debts to cover. Again, this does create trouble around the station.

A typical example of a Station problem is;

- Take any given line on a nine line roster. The lines two above and two below will never work with that line.
- Take one difficult Ambo that doesn't get along with the others. The Station Officer will bow to complaints and place two officers in those lines so as they don't have to work with the difficult Officer.
- The others, well, stiff.
- The Station Officer doesn't deal with the problem, doesn't talk to the difficult Officer, and doesn't bring the whole team together to sort the situation out.
- The problem manifests and grows like a cancer.
- You now have a disaster on the Station.

I urge this Enquiry to ask around any Station in the State and see just how many Ambo's can identify with this type of scenario.

The Professional Standards and Conduct Unit within the Ambulance Service is an absolute joke. It is there purely to make decisions that show the least impact on the Ambulance Service, not to discover the truth and resolve the issues. Any staff member who pushes for the truth is victimized by the Ambulance Service. That is probably why the PSCU is often called "Pathetic Standards and Cover Up". This Unit should be closed down immediately and a private independent company, with no Political, Union, Mason or Ambulance Service ties, should be hired to investigate issues within the Ambulance Service. Serious issues that should be reported to the police do not get reported, which to me, makes the Ambulance Service a law unto itself. I suggest one such reportable case, in regards to a recently sacked Station Officer

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