

**Submission
No 35**

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

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Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry

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Ambulance Service of New South Wales

Ambulance Employment History

My submission and experiences

I welcome the chance to be able to report on the problems I have faced since being an employee of the Ambulance Service of New South Wales.

Let me start by reporting on the culture of the Ambulance Service and the outdated hierarchy that governs it. It is mainly due to this that I have chosen to submit my thoughts and experiences.

The Ambulance Service's current structure of management has shown great disdain and turned a blind eye to many instances of bullying and harassment during my employment. It is disappointing to say the least and hopefully this inquiry is not just another waste of time in addressing these issues. The Ambulance Service has for many years not dealt appropriately with these issues, even though its policies state that they take these matters seriously.

During my employment as a Patient Transport Officer I endured prejudice in regard to how the management treated these officers. We were worked for 10 to 11 hours a day without a break and often forced to carry our lunches all day in the vehicle along with sick and infectious patients as we could be sent anywhere in the Sydney Metropolitan Region each day. Often also we were forced to work over 8 hours without being asked and just tasked to transports which were of a non urgent nature.

The first 4 courses of Patient Transport Officers were all trained by the same person and received the same training, we also went through the same recruitment processes. However the first 3 courses were offered direct entry into Trainee Ambulance Officers courses without applications and the 4th class had to apply through the General entry and go through the entire process again which is discrimination for a start and not EEO. This was heartbreaking and discriminatory towards these 20 or so people. I happened to be 1 of the 20 out of class 4.

When gaining the position of Operations Centre Officer the harassment did not stop there. I was first posted to the Operations Centre and during my first week there I was bullied and harassed by not only the staff but also the Operations Centre Manager. I found his demeanour to be rude, threatening and uncompromising as I complained in regard to the way his staff had treated me because I was not an Ambulance Officer, this was not followed up by him and I left feeling I was the perpetrator and not the victim. I also witnessed the harassment of another civilian controller

during this 1 week period, and was horrified at her treatment. Due to this I requested to be moved to the Operations Centre during my training at as I did not wish to endure that behaviour which was rampant and uncontrolled and obviously supported by management there.

At the Operations Centre I was treated with respect and enjoyed the relaxed approach from 95% of the Officers. However one person

was a bully and showed threatening and violence toward myself in dealing with stressful situations. I would sometimes deal with a problem myself instead of asking for his assistance due to his aggressive nature. One instance involved him standing over me and abusing me in front of supervisors to which nothing was done, I didn't complain as they had all worked there together for many years and I thought that maybe they just accepted his work practice due to him knowing everybody there. I was quite disappointed that an officer was allowed to act in this manner and have no reprisals or action taken against him.

Also while working at the Operations Centre I applied for the intake of Trainee Ambulance Officers in late 2000. I was successful and told I would be starting on a course in 2001. This didn't end up being the case and was then promised by and

that they needed me at the Operations Centre until April to when I could take Annual Leave and then start at for my Ambulance training. Seeing this opportunity I reluctantly agreed and the deal was done, unfortunately due to my naivety I did not request this in writing and you guessed it I was kept in the operations centre. This again happened in 2001 to where I was not placed in that course either. I was starting to think that I would have to apply again and go through the whole process and I was quite depressed at being taken for a ride with little I could do to appeal my treatment due to the attitude of management towards my situation. This was a promotion for me and the Service even has policies in regard to not being able to deny a promotion when I had earned it fairly and was successful in the application process. Finally in 2001 to great relief I commenced at for my Ambulance

training. Thinking everything was looking up little did I know what lay ahead or what I was about to endure.

2001 to 2002 was uneventful and I totally enjoyed working within Sydney and worked with Officers of the highest integrity. I commend those Officers I had the pleasure of working with and also the Education Staff during that period who displayed the professionalism I expected from the Ambulance service.

My real problems began when I was permanently posted to Station as a relief Officer. My family and I made a trip down to seek accommodation and meet the staff in 2002. All of the staff were quite welcoming and explained that the position I had been given was a relief position and that I would have to do approximately 16 weeks relief away from station each year. I was accepting of this originally, however I was not told at the posting process that some of the positions were relief and was told it was bad luck and that it would give me the chance to improve my area knowledge and independent skill. The staff were helpful in directing me to where the good and bad areas to live were. I did not get to meet the Station Manager that day due to him being on holidays.

When going through the posting process nothing was divulged in regards to which positions were designated relief and which weren't. We only found out after we had received our postings that some of our positions were designated relief. This was poor on the Ambulance Service's behalf as not just me but all Level 2 Ambulance Officers would have had to endure when there is quite a stressful and testing time. This was done on purpose to stop people just leaving the job after finding out they were relief Officers. Finding out that I was a relief Officer after being posted was a blow to my family which consisted of my wife a 9, 7 and 6 year old. I must say that I was happy to go to a rural posting and so was my family but we were not sure about the relief component. The new posting process is worse and even more harsh on Level 2 officers as they are only given a choice of Divisions and not even aware of the stations available to choose from.

Station had 5 permanent Officers and 1 designated relief (me), I started work there in 2002. From the moment I started at there was 1 Officer on Annual leave so I worked there for a while before being sent on relief. The roster system was the main problem at and the relief officer would only receive on call duties when someone was on leave. This was not always the case. I received less on call and was only given full on call when it suited the other staff, there was no choice or there were 2 people on leave. There was also a days off request book that you could nominate areas if you had something on but this was only for the permanent staff as they wouldn't be required to do relief and could be guaranteed the time off. The roster was a flexible roster for all permanent staff and if required the relief officer would fill the holes, this was constantly stated as they did not want to lose this inequitable roster. If not required I would be sent to other stations on over night relief.

Originally as I said I was told this would happen for only 16 weeks of the year but in reality this was more like 8 months of the year due to the roster person (not the station manager) adapting the roster so I wasn't needed on station, so they could do more on call and therefore earn more money. All of these Officers were earning \$100,000 plus dollars a year while I was lucky to manage \$75,000 which included my relief allowance. I stated that I believed that the current system was unfair and that I should be on Station when other people were on leave and given fair and equitable on call. They said due to our ability to use a flexible roster you are not always required here and that relief would be required elsewhere. District management were also aware that I could be made available due to the roster's flexibility and started to request that I be rostered off the main lines of roster to enable me to be sent on relief. The station officer along with told me that when someone left I would become permanent and get the benefits then and they all had to endure what I was going through, however I replied it doesn't make it right though and we have EEO now. This apparently had been the practice for many years and had been done to all relief officers that had worked at station and other areas of the sector. I was not happy with this and proceeded to complain to management and HSU in regard to this injustice and poor treatment of relief staff. This action incited staff at and relationships between myself and the other officers became fractured. In one instance I was told to watch out because there were 4 officers with mortgages to pay. I found this threatening and lodged a complaint to District Officer . I was told by Management that they were aware of this inequity and supported stance as it provided area relief to fill holes even though I had complained of the inequity in 2003. I was lucky enough one day to have met of who I found extremely helpful in terms of finding out what my rights were as a relief officer. I continued the fight which ended up being a long and drawn out process. During this time staff at continually placed file notes on me in a folder which was accessible to all staff at which I found to be totally inappropriate even though I was never spoken to in regards to their complaints. I was harassed when I took sick leave and also when on station in regards to me asking questions on why things had been changed on the roster and that I had periods when I was given no on call or when I did have on call I was not given weekends when callouts were paid at a higher rate. I was forced to do the majority of single officer transports to Wagga Wagga(250kms return), Albury (320kms return) and Griffith(130kms Return), this was sometimes one after the other while the permanent staff stayed in town and on station. I was becoming tired and also depressed in my treatment. It got so bad that I went to in and was prescribed anti-depressants to cope with my depression. This was also taking a huge toll on my family as well, as I was having marital problems, and my son developed behavioural difficulties at school due to me not being with my family. I approached for a confidential chat in regards to get a break from relief duties and remain at home for a while and work in . I explained that I was suffering from depression and was being treated through medication and the response I received both shocked and

distressed me more. His Words were "What do you want me to do about it!" You can imagine how deflated I felt and that all hope was gone in being able to get fair and equal conditions. To state an example of how much relief I was doing; in one financial year I spent 102 nights away from home, if you take into account 9 days on and 5 days off one fortnight and 10 days on and 4 days off on alternate fortnights it works out that I worked a total of 42 weeks away from station that year. This figure is vastly different to only 16 weeks quoted by staff when I first started there. They still reiterated to me to stop complaining because they would lose their current roster arrangements.

The staff stepped up their campaign and started telling civilian people they knew in the town that I was a trouble maker which then caused my family to start being snubbed at public events and by some of the same people we knew. Everybody was now watching everything my family and I did as I had reports from some of the people that knew us and that they had heard things. This was unbearable for all my family and the harassment from staff at station had over stepped the mark. During this period in early 2004 a decision was made between the permanent staff at , the sub branch of the HSU and the management that I was to be placed on 3rd call only, which was even more discriminatory towards me and restricted my earning capacity severely, this practice went on for several months until I lodged a complaint in 2004.

In 2004 I decided to lodge another complaint (attached with this submission) and complained that the officers at Station and were breaching its EEO, Code of Ethics and Harassment policies by allowing these inequities to continue. I did not complain about my treatment by Officers at this time for the fear of retaliation and further harassment. This was originally addressed to District Officer then to Sector Manager . I did not receive a reply in a fortnight so followed the chain of command and addressed my complaint to Operations Manager

was helpful and arranged an immediate meeting with and Me. I took a witness as my representative . During that meeting the first thing I was asked was if I was happy at and did I have anywhere else in mind. I responded and said I would like to stay at if this inequity was fixed. From this the managers looked into the on call situation and to their credit fixed the roster straight away. At the same time I was being threatened by permanent staff about them losing the flexible roster. I was bullied into asking the management to keep the roster so there would be flexibility for the permanent staff but still none for me. stated "I agree with you on the EEO principles; however there is nothing I can do." So I said I will take this to the General Manager of Operations Michael Willis.

I received feedback from Mr Willis in regards to a superintendent would be meeting with me to sort out my grievance. This happened in about 2004. arrived at Station and had a short word to myself then had meetings with all of the Staff. I found this inappropriate as he had not spoken to me first even though I was the one who had the grievance. This would have been beneficial as he would have been told what my

actual grievance was. Instead when it was my turn to have a meeting this rude and uncompromising manager was totally out of line and accused me as being the problem. He stated "It used to be like that in [redacted] when I worked there and you applied for this position knowing it was relief. If you don't accept the conditions then leave." I was mentally and physically shattered at his response and then he tore into me about bringing down the good name of the officers that worked at [redacted] Station. By this time 1 and a half hours into the meeting it had turned into a campaign to shut me up and he was told by the [redacted] Officers that I had applied for the position. I explained that I was posted here without choice and he replied it does not change the fact. I was not able to tell my side of the story or reiterate what my complaint was because he had already made his mind after speaking to the permanent [redacted] Staff. I was in dismay and felt pressured, harassed, bullied and useless. [redacted] is a management thug with very little compassion and people skills and should not hold a position of power within this Ambulance Service.

After the so called resolution of [redacted] to just put up with it I had no options left but to cop it on the chin and suffer ongoing victimisation, harassment, bullying, depression, and isolation from the [redacted] Staff. It should be noted that [redacted] did not offer me to have any representative to sit in on the meeting which itself is a breach of ASNSW policy.

To add to the dilemma I faced a new threat. A Trainee Ambulance Officer by the name of [redacted] came to train at our station. He was a family friend of [redacted] and his wife was a Police Officer in [redacted]. All the staff new him socially and they were all good friends. From the moment he walked into [redacted] to work he was treated better than I was because of his association. He would constantly mention that I would be leaving soon and that he would take my position so he could stay in town and not move. I didn't realise how serious he was until a large number of complaints were submitted in a grievance to Management in regard to my behaviour, sick leave, clinical practices, and alleged sexual references.

I was notified of a fact finding Investigation being done on me in 2004 by District Officer [redacted]. This process took 2 months and was I was required to answer allegations only 2 days before I was transferred to [redacted] on the [redacted]

This meeting involved [redacted] and my witness [redacted]. All allegations were tabled and I was given the right of reply. I denied several allegations of sexual harassment and nothing could be proved. I counter complained on the treatment of myself by [redacted] staff and asked for a further investigation to be done including interviewing [redacted] from [redacted] and [redacted] from [redacted] who had witnessed and heard of harassment and victimisation against me by [redacted] and [redacted]. Details and examples were given on dates times and issues on where I had been harassed for [redacted] to follow up. [redacted] witnessed DO Purcell stating he would investigate my claims. The officers mentioned [redacted] and [redacted] stated to me that they were never contacted after the meeting took place, leaving me to believe that nothing had been followed up

and it was swept under the carpet due to me leaving the area. I thought it would end there but I was wrong.

In summary the handling of my counter complaint and the lack of action by management against their own policies has allowed these officers to continually use their inappropriate bullying and harassment actions to belittle and threaten people. In the private sector these officers wouldn't have a job due to the liability they have created. It is disappointing management has allowed this to happen and knew it was happening. I followed up with PSCU on what the result of the investigation was after 6 months. They knew nothing of it and followed it up with . He had not completed it and I was informed by PSCU that there was no case to answer. This however still did not address the counter complaints I had raised and I was left with a feeling of hollowness again from the lack of proficient management of the ASNSW.

After arriving at in 2005 I met my new Station Officer . Unfortunately for me trying to leave all that had happened in behind I couldn't as his wife and soon to start at was extremely close friends with from and both of these officers had been warned about me before I had even arrived. These two officers and continued to make my life hell while at Station. I was labelled fraudulent, incompetent, and clinically inept and still suffered harassment, bullying and threatening behaviour from both of them. They also proceeded to bad mouth my reputation to other officers on station in the hope of turning them against me and isolating me again. I unfortunately had to endure periods of silence from these officers constant scrutiny and harassing behaviour. I found out later that they had also reiterated this to upper management who again allowed this to happen. I had had enough and complained to

. This happened in front of who then labelled me a liar because I had complained about his wife . Still there was no action taken and the harassment went on. Again I ended up on anti-depressants and contacted ICS the counselling service supplied by the service. I attended several visits to try and cope with the situation. During the period that these officers were at I was even abused on the phone while on a job by

. The problem of further harassment stemmed from these two officers attending wedding in . heard these officers talking at the and District Bowling Club on how they were going to make my life hell and make him pay for what he did down here. That was 2005. I could not escape the harassment anywhere.

In 2006 I had the unfortunate event of gaining a workplace injury to which was to keep me off for an extended amount of time. During this time was to heard saying to the then he will not be working at . So with a shoulder repair to be done and suffering constant pain when driving the sector management made me drive 800kms per week to for light duties. This severely hampered my recovery and was sometimes unbearable. I wasn't even supplied light duties for 5 weeks after my injury due to the reluctance of to support me whilst injured. Because of the reports from treated me with contempt

and queried whether my claim was fraudulent. In no way did he assist in my recovery. After my operation in 2006 management again made me drive 800kms per week to do light duties of a similar nature that could have been done in . Thankfully I put in a huge effort in the gym and tried to get my shoulder right to return to work this happened in 2006. My recovery period was lengthened due to having to drive to 4 days a week adding stress to my recovering shoulder.

Thankfully after another 18 months of torture and left and moved to other stations in September 2006. This was the biggest relief I ever had.

October 2006 was promoted to the position of Station Manager at . This manager who was also born and bred under the current management structure and also displays blatant and ignorant abuse of his position. I have constantly witnessed his bullying and harassment of not only me but several other officers on Station and despise his attitude towards the staff he is responsible for. He also threatens staff constantly and is over bearing and non compromising in his approach. If you question his decision or complain he will then single you out and find whatever he can to convict you. He does not display empathy or tactfulness when dealing with situations and constantly raises his voice to chastise people when asking about small mistakes or mishaps. He continually conducts witch hunts and intimidates the person involved to belittle them and make them feel less than inadequate. The ASNSW sector management of the obviously are supportive of his management methods and promoted him to an acting position of in late 2007. Just another fine example on how the current practices of senior management are supporting the current management culture which is 25 years out of date.

At this point in time there is a grievance that has been lodged by several members of staff at Station in regards to this manager's demeanour. Not all staff are involved due to their concern of reprisal attacks by this manager. The staff are so disgruntled, that the majority do not want him to return as station manager after this complaint had been lodged as his nature will not allow him to let it be once complete. He will want revenge and will be hell bent on getting it as he has done in the past. One example of his disregard for the policies of the ASNSW is the fact that he has requested Doctors Certificates from officers who have taken sick leave for less than the mandatory period of absence (more than two days). These officers have taken 1 or 1.5 days off and have been harassed to produce certificates over weeks. He has even called an officers wife's work to check if she had attended work that evening also when he had called in sick.

Unfortunately I have little or no faith in the grievance process which is understandable from what I have endured so far throughout my career with the ASNSW. Again I am expecting that he will remain in his position and he will think that he can't be touched as the management will look after their own allowing him to continue his iron fist rule. I am hoping this inquiry will change that.

In concluding my submission there are huge shortfalls in what should be standard practice from the current policies. The current policies are adequate but however the current management at all levels is not and their blatant refusal to deal with serious issues in terms of bullying and harassment is sub par. There are many excellent and capable Ambulance Officers in NSW, unfortunately the lack of inaction by management or just moving someone somewhere else encourages the practice of bullying, threatening behaviour, harassment and victimisation in the Service. It is time for these practices to stop and hold accountable the management that refuse to support staff that are victims as is stated in the policies. I for one will not tolerate this behaviour by management or any staff for that matter and that is why I have submitted my story and experiences to you in the hope that it doesn't get swept under the carpet again.

As a result of the practices I stated I would estimate that I have lost around \$100,000 in lost wages and an immeasurable amount of time and happiness with my family. Not to mention the loss of my mental state in periods.

Do something now before they claim another victim or lose even more staff to suicide.

Regards

Michael Taylor