

Submission
No 42

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

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Partially Confidential

Submission to Ambulance enquiry

I have been an ambulance/station officer based in _____ since commencing with the ASNSW in _____. During that time I feel that I have given up a great chunk of my life to the ASNSW and although it is a very rewarding job, it is at times very stressful and thankless. There are many varied issues facing this organisation due to the top heavy management structure, the most important of these is resistance to change and keeping up with modern management practices.

The service still clings to an outdated style of managing people poorly, for example, promoting or moving difficult staff rather than dealing with the issues, or not acting on issues and hoping they go away. I know of an incident at another station where a staff member had an argument with his station officer (S/O) and threatened to harm him.

_____. This situation was not addressed for over 12 months until the offending officer was offered a mediation session with the S/O. During that time both officers had to work together as it is a relatively small station. The S/O was offered no support from management prior to the mediation.

There is a lack of capital funding in the ASNSW. Walk into any ambulance station around the state and you will see the effects of no maintenance having been carried out for many years and what once would have cost little to fix will now need major costs to repair. An example on our station is the gutters have rusted and are falling down and we have had a leaking roof. We are lucky compared to some.

The ASNSW requires staff to maintain a level of fitness to reduce injuries especially back injuries, due to the nature of the job which involves heavy lifting and working in awkward situations. Unlike the NSW Fire Brigade who actively encourage and financially support their officers to attend a gym, the ASNSW expects that you will keep fit in your own time and at your own expense. There are ample opportunities for rural officers to attend a gym due to their reduced workload compared to the metropolitan staff. This is especially important as officers on call and relief do not sometimes have the opportunity to attend the gym after work.

Another issue is rural relief. The metropolitan officers, if they have to relieve at another station during their shift get to return back to their residence at the completion of shift, unlike their rural counterparts who are sent to isolated stations for up to 7 days at a time, away from their family.

Something I feel really strongly about is on call and mainly occurs in rural areas. The metropolitan officers once finished their shift, even though they often work overtime, go home to their family and their life, they are able to go out socially and if they want have a drink, go see a movie etc. Rural officers on completion of their shift take an ambulance home and cover on call until the next day when they

commence shift again. This can happen for 6 to 7 nights in a row before the officer goes on 2 days off before starting again. Out of 28 nights the officer can be rostered to do 14 nights on call as per the award, this has been happening long before I started. The ambulance or union have never properly addressed the fatigue issue. Between rostered shifts, the award states that an officer must have a minimum 10 hr break. This does not always occur when on call, as the officer can be disturbed many times during the night and be expected to front up for work the next day. The officer can ask for a sleep in, but in a station where you are the only rostered crew on duty, when a case comes in you are deployed on it, therefore further increasing fatigue.

On many occasions I have been up on several cases the night before and gone to work as usual and then had to come home and try to get a sleep prior to that night on call, thereby limiting valuable family time. The officer's partner also suffers from disturbed sleep when the phone rings and when their partner returns, they mostly also have work commitments. The next day officers have the option of going off fatigued if they wish, but this creates further workload stress on other officers that have to fill your absence. The on call allowance works out to be roughly \$1 per hour, this is very cheap labour. During that time you are limited as to what activities you can do as you must be available to respond at short notice, therefore a round of golf or a walk to help reduce stress after work is not possible.

The ambulance service has got away with having reduced staffing levels in rural areas for many years. They rely on staff loyalty to cover the town on officer's days off and often staff off duty are called in to attend cases at mine and other surrounding stations. Although we are paid for the callouts, there are times when you feel compelled to respond to cases, for example you may be at a social function and co-ord call and say they have no one else to do the case and you feel an obligation to attend, so there are times when even though you are off duty you are not. There are also many functions over the last 29 years that I have been called away from. I realise that there no quick solutions to these staffing issues but I feel that the general public has no idea of the obligations that are expected of us after hours. You are an ambo 24/7.

We are not paid accordingly for the responsibility the job involves. Our hourly rate is well below nurses and other emergency service personnel. As ambulance officers we are the first and only medical personnel at a scene and over the years our responsibilities have increased dramatically with new drugs, and procedures that we have not been compensated for in allowance or pay rise. Nurses in the hospital cannot administer most drugs without a Dr authorising, whereas we are able to administer many drugs in the field. An example of how poorly paid we are is that I know an apprentice with an electricity company who is on a similar hourly rate to me, where I supervise staff as well as work on the road as an ambulance officer. Our work ethic and loyalty is not rewarded either by recognition or financially.

Thank You for the opportunity to submit my thoughts on the ASNSW to the Parliamentary enquiry.