

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

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Partially Confidential

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No 2
Parliament House

Attached is my submission for the inquiry into the Operations and Management of the New South Wales Ambulance Service.

Actually it is difficult to know where to start; in my short years with the Ambulance Service of New South Wales I have become quite disillusioned with the management and policies of such a large organization.

I have what I consider to be grounded management experience and cannot quite believe nor understand the hypocrisy, the insincerity, the lack of transparency, within the leading ranks of our service.

Often I ask myself what attracted me to this job, and I believe for a lot of us it is to help others. That is as simple as it gets! This reason alone attracts many people, but there is one trait that I have found to be in every paramedic I have met, and that is compassion. I do believe it takes a special type of person to **stay** in this job. However this is the first thing I notice depleted as employees become more and more cynical. Our 'good nature' is constantly taken advantage of..... You only need to look at any industrial disputes; do we ever really go on strike?????

Probation/ Training Period

I was given just a few weeks notice to attend my first day at Education Centre, Rozelle NSW. Seven weeks of intensive training, absolutely overwhelming.....The living quarters in Rozelle are antiquated and under resourced, quite a welcome to the reality of the organization

As each week went by, we of a class of 50 asking, waiting, hypothesizing trying to juggle being away from our family and friends, studying, (for some overwhelming so, as they had never worked in health), worrying about the future. Finally on the fifth week we were given our stations, where we would be placed with a training officer for a period of time before either going to another station or given to another training officer.

These training officers are not given any choice about being given a trainee. In a lot of cases trainees or probationers are treated very poorly, just because of this reason alone. Not every employee is suitable to be a trainer. So how would you feel working along side

somebody in your first few weeks knowing they don't want to work with you little lone train you? There is NO incentive to train anybody except for personal satisfaction.....as I said earlier, compassion dwindling, cynicism increases..... it starts early!!!!

I find it difficult to understand the lack of monetary incentive for training an employee particularly in dealing with life threatening situations. As I have worked in Training prior to joining the Ambulance Service I was paid accordingly over \$60.00 per hour and it did not involve any life saving.

While we are on the subject of training, I draw your attention to the two modules that are still being taught at Rozelle Education out of the old Certificate Four training and assessing package. It is not even endorsed anymore and yet it is still being taught, by trainers that have no idea. Unfortunately I had the thrill of sitting in a lecture recently and found the whole experience to be a farce!!

It makes a mockery of what is required to train and assess employees.

There are many more issues associated to the probationary time of an Ambulance officer. Currently a probationer is placed in the front line treating patients after only eight weeks at Rozelle. A trainee should be at least a third officer on a car for a period of time. They should be supported by suitable training officers and debriefed after major jobs or as required, and should be mandatory. We need to encourage and look after these people they are the future of the service....., but yet again so many feel let down and supported in no way, often resulting in resignation.

I found the probationary time to be devastating to my personal life, thus impacting on my work. I was training in Sydney working long shifts, studying as well as traveling 400kms each way after every night shift to spend with my family, that was slowly falling apart. I was an emotional wreck and continued to seek assistance never once asking to be placed in my home town, just somewhere closer. I don't want to go into every little detail, but without any support from management, I had no choice but to resign. I grieved and was very depressed during this time as my partner could no longer work and I had come to love the job,

but I took the position and moved my entire family for months, at my own cost. This involved my children starting a new school as well as all of us making a new, but short life in the town. We still did not know where we would end up!!!!!!

I wonder how many managers understand the logistics of moving an entire family with absolutely no support, knowing that after this months we would be moved again!!!! Not once did I receive a letter of apology or any follow up calls just to check how things were going.....

Level 2 – Permanent Posting

This is how it works: prior to returning to Rozelle for continued training for a period of 3 weeks, you are given a list of sectors available that you are to prioritise. At no time are you given an opportunity to request a location that would be more suitable for you. Yes we all agree during recruitment and even are made to sign a piece of paper to say we will go anywhere in the state.

Then with just a few weeks notice you are given your placement, which is your permanent station. Some of these stations are extremely remote with minimal support and little resources. Remember that you have been hand held for nine months, but now deemed to save lives and make life altering decisions..... Most of these stations have an on call component, and often you have to work alone. You may be in a strange town, a job you are still not that familiar with and 1000 kms from your nearest and dearest. **What support do you get!!!!**

If you do something wrong, you don't get a 'touchy feely', visit from a caring supportive manager, no you get a rude phone call or letter, with a please explain. It is extremely rare to be 'patted on the back' for a job well done or in a lot of cases an extraordinary job well done..... It is forgotten that you have such a short scope of experience and if a head needs to be rolled it is often a junior officer.... There are huge occupational health and safety issues associated to working alone, and believe me you can only ever offer your patient, your responsibility, **BASIC** life support.

My experience with my level 2 permanent posting!

I was given a posting to an exceptionally small town, with huge socioeconomic and cultural problems. There were no medical facilities, inadequate schooling and to top it off there was absolutely nil accommodation for a family . Too bad I was told. My spirit was dwindling and once again was on the merry-go-round to nowhere.

I was devastated and once again faced the question of resigning!!!! Why was this so difficult, I didn't feel that I was asking for much.

I still ask the question **WHY!** There is so much emotion and torment that is endured during these times that cannot be expressed with words.

There has to be another way of supporting employees with the process of allocating permanent stations. Why can't it be done????

Even when you are sent to these remote and rural areas, it is often difficult to get out. If you do your required two years and apply for positions that are more suitable, no weight is given to your loyalty. Once again there is no equity, often a newly trained level 2 officer will be given a metropolitan placement, while a level 2 officer is stuck out the back of nowhere. Even to apply for a position is quite an ordeal, however it has been refined in the last 12 months.

I am not a trouble maker, I am hard working and was just asking for some support. It is difficult to not take the actions of what occurred to me as victimization. Up until now I have just accepted what is, but nobody should ever be frightened in their workplace to speak up. Bullying, harassment and discrimination is prevalent within the culture of the Ambulance Service NSW.

If you are a trouble maker, it appears you get moved to where ever you want to go!!!!

Policies

Bullying and Harassment

The policy for bullying and harassment equals zero tolerance.....The human mind interprets things differently and words can be construed to suit any situation. Or so it appears with many in our leadership roles.

I have been witness to numerous assaults of harassment and bullying. I have seen employees down trodden so much they feel there only escape is to uproot their lives and move. I have seen officers stood down, not ever knowing why. Never given the chance to respond about the incident in question, kept in the dark. I am not even sure some of our illustrious leaders know the sequence of events for a correct inquiry. It is difficult to stand back and watch some of our fellow officers get treated with such contempt. Once again there is no support for these people whether guilty or not. We see some of the most

horrific incidences that you can imagine and yet it is the harassment in our workplace that has the most impact!

Sick Leave

I cannot understand why an employee would be questioned about their illness or reason for utilizing a sick day that they are entitled too. We are entitled to 2 days off without having a Doctors certificate. However it has been noted that under some of our leaders we are to validate our sick days regardless of the policy. If we are to be questioned perhaps the policy needs changing. We are entitled to privacy and confidentiality, we also have a duty of care to our fellow officers and patients when we are sick. We are at the forefront of sickness. We have an extremely tense job at times not too mention the stress and fatigue associated to shift work. Why should we be questioned????? Why should any of us be isolated and confronted, this is also indicative of harassment.

Carers Leave and FACS Leave

Interesting policy, we have to sign a statutory declaration to prove time off was required for an appointment or for the care of a sick child. I have children
why should I have to explain my reasons on a statutory declaration????

Pregnancy and Part Time Work

There appears to be an exceptional amount of flaws in this policy. I have witnessed discrimination of pregnant employees first hand. Once again who can they turn too, when the leaders are making all the rules to suit themselves. There are different rules for different sectors, nothing is equal, nothing is organized, and nothing is transparent. The acronym used for this policy is even hideous, SAD = Suitable Alternate Duties, so motivating!!!!

The other issue running alongside this is the return to work for parents, but predominately the mother. There are no policies for flexibility within our roster. Why can we not adopt

self rostering principles is beyond me!!!!!! Why is it that the part time working policy only exists for children under school age??????

Whether you are a single parent or dual working family, shift work is difficult to manage. We need to look at ways to improve this. Currently we are extremely expressive about our dollar worth. Gratuity doesn't always need to come from money, incentive can be provided in many ways. This also increases staff retention and more importantly staff morale.

Skill Enhancement and Wages

When I first joined this profession level 3C was the standard of a qualified Ambulance Officer. There final training was approximately 3 weeks at Rozelle Education. The standard now is a Paramedic 1, still with 3 weeks at Rozelle but a huge increase of skills, protocols and pharmacology's. The training and study required now compared to the old standard is colossal. I cannot express the enormity of study required and is in fact only for 2 weeks as the 3rd week is committed to training and assessing. There has been no monetary increase for these enhancements..... So why would an officer with years of experience improve their skills, what would be the incentive???? Once again it is for personal satisfaction, why would you want extra responsibility?????

Why should or would we want to increase our skills when there is no gratuity in any way at all. Recently we have been given a new system to learn our protocols etc..... Did we receive any training with thisNO, we were sent everything with a booklet to learn within a few days.... So it would be in action by the 1st July 2008.

Currently our wages are under review and rightly so. Our work not only involves life threatening situations but also a commitment to the Ambulance Service to give so much of your time. The sacrifices that are made to your family and social life are extra - ordinary. In a lot of rural areas across the state you are on call for 8 or so nights. Of course we deserve an increase in our award. Who else has to make these sacrifices in their employment?

There are tumultuous issues within the organization of the NSW Ambulance Service. I really do hope that something positive and proactive comes from this inquiry. Most of us still love our jobs and are looking forward to a future that is brighter, more equal, more transparent and less harassed.

I thank you for the time in reading my submission.