

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

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Partially Confidential

Submission for The Management and Operations of the NSW Ambulance Service
(Inquiry)

I feel that it is time for me to bring this problem right to the forefront of everyone's mind. Last [redacted] I resigned from the Ambulance Service of NSW (ASNSW), having been in the Service since [redacted] 2000. I spent almost 7 years, first as an AO and then as the Station Manager, in the small country town of Boggabri, Tamworth Sector, in the north west of the state.

Shortly after taking up duties as the Station Manager of this small station I noticed that some officers in neighbouring [redacted] Station and in [redacted] Station had begun a campaign of undermining my authority and my competence. Remarks were made to other officers, especially ones who had been posted to [redacted] and had occasion to call into other stations, particularly [redacted] Station, in the vein of, "Well, she is not a real ambo. She only trained at [redacted] and is not properly competent to do her job." At the time I chose to ignore all of this believing that it was "sour grapes" because I had gained the position. The position was open to everyone and I was the only applicant as small country towns are not popular workplaces for ambos. The general consensus is that ambos who work in small stations are less competent than their peers and are "hiding" for some reason.

During 2006 and 2007, I noticed an increase of this kind of comment and mostly coming from _____ officers who were required to carry out relief duties in _____. These comments were mostly derogatory about the town of _____ itself and about the (brand new) Ambulance station. As the months of 2007 wore on, however, these comments became more and more like a campaign of attacks on me personally. Officers who had been sent to _____ to fill relief positions became more and more abusive to me and about me. One officer stating that I was a poor officer because I always chose to drive the vehicle and insisted that the Level 2 officer did all of the treating of the patients. Another officer stated that I did all of the treating of the patients and insisted that the Level 2 officers always drive the vehicle. One or the other, but both is impossible. And in any case they are both completely wrong as we had a system of alternation positions as most places do. One Officer from _____, actually strode all about the Station, shouting at me and saying that I should do this and I should do that. None of which was anything to do with him, nor with me as it happens. He was talking about issues regarding the running of the _____ Hospital. Not our business at all. I felt intimidated by the very large, aggressive man shouting at me to do something about the way the hospital was run. He would not listen to reason and I finally just let him continue ranting and raving. However, it was a very frightening experience.

For me the final straw came one Thursday when one of the District Officers (DO) and the Acting Assistant Divisional Manager from _____ Sector Office arrived at the station to investigate complaints which stated that I ran the vehicles with out-of-date stock; that I ran the vehicles with inadequate supplies of equipment; that my store room did not contain enough equipment to stock an ambulance vehicle; that my ambulances were in fact dirty; that _____ station was dirty; that I was incompetent; and that I was "never on the station". None of these complaints had any substance whatsoever. The DO and the Acting Assistant Divisional Manager went through the vehicles and the stores with a fine tooth comb and found nothing to have been true. The station and vehicles were always kept clean and ready for action. The vehicles were fully stocked with in-date drugs and ample supplies of equipment to provide a full service to the people of _____ and surrounding district. The store room was well stocked, with depleting stock having

already been ordered from the general stores. I was not incompetent and my case sheets and my work record could testify to that.

At that point, I simply said "This is a witch hunt and I've had enough." I informed the DO and the Acting Assistant Divisional Manager that I would write my resignation that afternoon and they would have it by mail next day. Half hearted attempts to dissuade me were made at that point but I had made up my mind to leave. Following that day there were no more attempts to dissuade me, my written resignation, giving 4 weeks notice and citing bullying and harassment as my reasons for resigning, was sent on 2007, was accepted by the Acting Assistant Divisional Manager and I received written acknowledgement of my resignation by mail the following 2007.

Shortly after this time it was pointed out to me that three other Station Officers, from the Sector, had resigned from the ASNSW in the previous 18 months. *All of them female.* Immediately following my resignation notification another *female* Station Officer from the Sector resigned from the ASNSW. This then makes a total of *FIVE female Station Officers* from the Sector to have resigned from the ASNSW within 18 months. There are only 19 Stations in all in the Sector. I was the only one of the five to have cited bullying and harassment as the reason for my resignation. I brought these resignations to the attention of the Sector Office and was told that each of these officers had resigned for personal reasons. On my last day in the ASNSW, I again brought up the subject of the resignation of five female Station Officers within a period of 18 months and suggested to the Assistant Divisional Manager, who had returned from his absence from the Sector, that this was worthy of investigation. Approximately two months later I received a letter from the Assistant Divisional manager informing me that I was completely wrong in thinking that three of these Station Managers had resigned for any reason other than what they had cited on their own resignations. He did not make mention of the fifth, the one immediately following mine. He reminded me of the ASNSW's policy of zero tolerance towards

bullying and harassment of any kind. I have never replied to that letter. What would be the point?

I resigned rather than fight as I had witnessed several times, the kind of treatment meted out to people who fight or who make a complaint in that Sector. I have seen one family almost destroyed following a complaint of bullying by an ambo, and the perpetrators of that incidence of bullying, harassment and intimidation were protected by the Sector Office at every turn. I have seen a grown man brought to "mental breakdown" because of the treatment he was given when he made a complaint of bullying and harassment in the Sector. I have talked with one officer who was told when he attempted to make a complaint, that the perpetrator was "untouchable" and that this man, the victim, was just making trouble in any case. These incidences are not isolated, they are simply the most severe that I have seen, and they each worsened after the complaint was made. Many good officers have transferred out of the Sector purely because of bullying or harassment and a total lack of support.

I believe that a concerted campaign of bullying and harassment was used to push me, and in all probability, each of the other four female Station Officers, to resign from the ASNSW. Before the incident which finally led to my resignation I had approached my doctor to get some help and subsequently spent 6 months having psychological therapy to bring myself back from that troubled place. I did not "go off on stress leave" nor did I put in any kind of claim for compensation or payment by WorkCover.

I believe that bullying, harassment and intimidation are endemic in the ASNSW. These problems cost all sections of the community billions of dollars each year because they are not recognised as problems and because the perpetrators are encouraged to continue without censure or consequence. Fighting the bullies is heartbreaking and degrading and victims almost always come out looking like "the bad guys". Many victims prefer to do what I did, just leave and start again somewhere else. Not everyone gets the help they need though and the sooner these OH&S and mental health issues are wiped out, and the perpetrators brought to justice, the better for the entire Australian population.