

Submission
No 147

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

Name: Suppressed

Date received: 3/07/2008

Partially Confidential

The Director
General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Re: The Management and Operations of the NSW Ambulance Service

Dear Madam

Please accept my submission to the inquiry into the management and operations of the NSW Ambulance Service.

I thank you for this opportunity to highlight some areas that I strongly believe need attention.

Regards

(a) Management Structure and Staff Responsibilities

My name is _____ and I am Paramedic working at _____ Ambulance Station.

I am pregnant and currently undertaking Suitable Alternant Duties or SAD as it is referred to. As per the award and SOP ambulance officers after 24 weeks gestation a medical certificate must be provided confirming fitness and ability to continue working in normal duties. Due to the nature of our occupation I chose in consultation with my doctor that I would commence SAD for the safety of myself and my unborn child.

We are often sitting in the back of the ambulance for long periods whilst doing long distance transfers and performing often difficult tasks that require our bodies to get in some very awkward positions for example squeezing in the back of damaged vehicles, walking down steep embankments, crouching on your knees performing CPR for long periods of time. We often come into contact with potentially violent situations involving domestic disputes and drunkenness. There is also the physical aspect of the job that requires manual handling tasks including lots of heavy lifting of patients.

There have been cases where pregnant women are evidently working for longer periods than they would have done otherwise due to the inflexible nature of SAD. They would have been forced to travel unreasonable distances to complete these duties as they are not made available at your own station. There are also implications financially as there is a disproportionate amount of our pay that is made up with penalty rates. Thus, women on SAD are on a flat rate of pay putting dramatic strain on family budgets.

I have been told by senior management these SAD duties have to be "Meaningful Duties" and are to be carried out at a District or Sector office under supervision. I accept the meaningful part as I would like to make a valid contribution to the workplace. However, the notion of having to travel seems unnecessary and inefficient.

ASNSW Management has instructed women that they are required to travel to central locations to be supervised. Yet as paramedics "the most trusted professionals" we are

trusted to train probationary officers when not fully qualified ourselves then posted to remote rural towns with less than 2 years experience. We often respond on our own in the middle of the night to the middle of no-where and trusted to save people lives yet as a pregnant Ambulance officer are not to be trusted to work unsupervised at our own stations????

We are required to advise management of our pregnancy as soon as possible which I did in writing at 14 weeks gestation. We are also required to advise of the date in which maternity leave is to commence so unlike an injury or illness these duties are for a very limited time.

One would assume this would be ample time for management to organize SAD duties from Sydney or even liaise with your own station manager if there are tasks that can be done at your own station. I created a list in consultation with my Acting Station Manager of tasks that I could perform on station but this was not even open for discussion.

Apparently there is a policy somewhere which I am yet to see (even though it has been requested) that states SAD duties are to be "meaningful" as determined by management and performed at District or Sector Office regardless of wasted resources and time.

I am using an operational Subaru rapid response vehicle at 170km a day and traveling in work hours, sometimes taking close to 3 hours a day in travel due to roadwork's on the pacific highway.

One of the excuses management has given is that some work may be confidential. So far none of the duties I have done have involved anything remotely confidential or been anything I could not have performed at my own station. I also find it difficult to comprehend the thought that management would give me any confidential tasks to do in the first place.

I have advised management that the travel and continual sitting at a computer causes my back to ache. The response from management was "maybe I shouldn't be working". I am also advised that if I provide a doctors certificate saying I can no longer drive the

distance the problem may be that ASNSW are unable to provide me with any "Meaningful duties" in _____ and I will be forced to start maternity leave early.

I suggested I could do some public relations work, call the local child care centers and schools as I thought this was encouraged and have done school visits in the past but this I am told by management is not to be done. I am not to chase up this kind of community work. It can be done if they contact us but I can not contact them the reason being people may get upset if they are not contacted by the ambulance service next year or if they miss out.

I am also advised I am not to drive an operational ambulance vehicle. The reason being if you come across an accident or something you are expected to respond and this may put me at risk or make the service look bad if I am unable to physically do anything. I reminded management I am driving a fully operational vehicle to _____ (on one of the most dangerous highways in NSW which only just had a double fatality yesterday

_____ The response from management was if we had an unmarked vehicle that would be preferable but we don't. It is also noted that other people have to drive ambulances such as mechanics employed by the service or employed by other organisations.

Management state that they will only provide SAD at District, Sector or Divisional Offices and will not allow SAD at the station for which the Officer works on a daily basis in the Northern Division. Despite the use of email, telephone, fax machines and a reliable mail service they do anything to obstruct the Officer from doing duties at their home station (even when one of the managers lives in _____ and commutes to _____ in another ASNSW operational vehicle daily)

In this male dominated organisation there seems to be little empathy for a pregnant female that may have to unnecessarily travel long distances to complete SAD. It seems the ASNSW management would prefer pregnant Officers to utilise other leave rather than doing SAD. One would think this is unreasonable and perhaps discriminatory.

The ASNSW has a useful resource where women on SAD can be utilized to do meaningful duties in many roles such as PR exercises, administration, training,

education and peer support etc. Unfortunately when it is not a funded position the management do their best to deter a paramedic from filling that position.

(b) Staff Recruitment, Training and Retention

In regards to Staff Recruitment, Training and Retention, well it goes without saying that when treated by management in such an appalling manner during their pregnancy officers may choose to seek other employment. Women may also consider not returning from maternity leave due to that it not worth the trouble and choose to be stay at home mums. Thus adding to the ASNSW inability to retain qualified staff.

(c) Staff Occupational Health and Safety Issues

The health and safety issues of the pregnant officer seem to be non existent. The sitting and driving for long periods seem to be acceptable to the males in the management positions. Not to mention the fact I am away from my home town should anything happen to my unborn baby and I need to seek any medical help from my regular care givers. There is also the added stress of the difficult manner in which they chose to manage these situations.

(e) Any Other Related Matter

When my initial enquiries began regarding my SAD duties as the Award states "they must be as close as possible in status and salary to her substantive position". Being a shift worker and knowing the management staff work 7 days a week one would assume my days could include part of a weekend and with start and finish times negotiable for childcare and financial reasons. I refer to the Flexible work practices-policy which apparently applies to a multitude of health services including NSW Ambulance Service. I am aware this has happened with other pregnant staff so I find it very discriminatory. Management state my days are to be Monday to Friday and office hours for reasons unknown?? My acting station manager advised me his superior stated "that my duties may not be as flexible as they first were". I wonder if this is due to all of my enquires into SAD.

Recommendations for action

I am no expert on the development of policies and procedures but there clearly needs to be a better system in place for pregnant ambulance officers. In this day and age there is no excusable reasons why women have to drive long distances or be away from there home stations or start their maternity leave early due to the lack of or the portability of SAD. As soon as management are notified of an officers pregnancy the officer should be sent any policies in writing regarding SAD, management would then have months to organize work from Sydney or liaise with station officers regarding station duties the officer could fulfill utilizing the other many skills the officer may have and at their home station. Why is this such an issue???

From this enquiry I hope change can be made.

Thank you for the opportunity to present my concerns.

Kind Regards