

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

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Partially Confidential

## Submission into the management and operations of the ASNSW.

Where do I begin...? I was an Ambulance Officer for approximately 6 years and I got out saving myself. I was constantly in inner conflict with the culture of the ASNSW. I didn't agree with what they stood for and the example that they set. How many more people have to suffer or die before the culture within the ASNSW changes? There are a lot of employees who are suffering and have nowhere to go, they are crying out for help, when will someone stand up and do something about it as enough is enough, this is not a joke or just employees being disgruntled about management, or 'they must have done what they did because they were single or had problems at home'. Why are people committing suicide? Why is there drug and alcohol abuse? Why are good experienced people leaving the job at a faster rate than they can recruit? Why can't they hang onto their staff? They may be the most trusted profession to the community, but within the service nothing could be further from the truth.

Perhaps you are wondering why I feel the need to put in a submission into the management and operations of the ASNSW as I am no longer an employee of the service, and what happens doesn't directly affect me anymore. I am writing this as I cannot turn a blind eye to what goes on within the service and see Ambulance Officers suffer anymore. Anyone who is a witness to a crime, suffering or injustice has an obligation to say something. Ambulance Officers play an important role in society and deserve to be acknowledged, respected and supported. Their work can be traumatic at the best of times. They are underpaid and the general public are not aware how underpaid Ambulance Officers are with the responsibilities that they have, or of the uncaring corrupt management system they have to work under.

When hearing of more suicides, it brings back bad memories as I am reminded of what it was like while working in the ASNSW. I didn't like wearing the uniform as I didn't agree with what it stood for, to me it represented everything I disliked – lack of care and support – after all "who cares for the carers"? I am pretty sure that many employees have entertained thoughts that most 'normal' people wouldn't, and the feelings these people experience are painful, they are in conflict within themselves, they become isolated and feel unworthy. The ASNSW does not have a healthy workplace, it has policies it hides behind but doesn't implement.

From the very beginning I found the culture of the service to be backwards and "something wasn't quite right". I became aware early on of a boys club mentality as I felt that there was no genuine care of myself by males, only a need to get to know me for

trying their alternative reasons. I also learnt early on that there was a theme out there of "keep your friends close and your enemies closer". Who to be trusted was a big thing. If you disclosed anything personal about yourself you could be guaranteed that it would either be used against you, or turned into something more and a rumour be made from it.

So you learn that the wisest thing to do was to keep to yourself. There are also many clicks within the service who are poisonous, they create and spread rumours, their actions are of a bullying and harassment nature and can isolate and demean anybody that they feel they want to, and there is no support for the officers who are victims of this. How can you expect staff on the road to do the right thing when management don't set a good example and adhere to policies themselves let alone implement them to protect their staff? If someone is victimised, they are usually re-victimised again by management's inaction or incorrect actions against the offenders. Management needs to set the precedence of what's expected, there needs to be managers that are not corrupt and cover things up. All ASNSW employees need to know what behaviour is expected from them and what the repercussions of breaching the code of conduct and policies are. All ASNSW staff need to know they can have faith in a system that is fair and equitable, there needs to be trust and confidence in this system, officers need to feel protected and know that managers are also under the same scrutiny and are also dealt with effectively if they breach these policies. There needs to be somewhere that officers can go to be heard, and have something done to protect them, or actively address their issues and have them resolved appropriately rather than ignored or made to feel guilty about them, as at the moment there is nowhere for officers to go. As much as ASNSW has an IPS psychological service in place, this is often used against staff rather than to protect. ASNSW can subpoena information from IPS since IPS works for ASNSW. When is anyone going to address the concerns officers have made to IPS about the ASNSW and its management, I am sure IPS has heard over and over again the same issues and complaints that are making officers sick and the amount of officers on Anti-depressants is increasing all the time.

The service is a reactive service rather than a pro-active service. It is constantly in damage control as I am sure it would be right now. The only solution to this that I can see is that ICAC needs to be involved and also a Royal Commission like there was in the police Force. For as long as management is run in house, nothing will change. For an on-road officer to climb the ranks and become part of management, you cannot be seen to rock the boat and disrupt the status quo. They will only employ an officer into management if they do what they are told and run the ship as it has always done. Any fresh blood that

doesn't comply with this will not go far in the promotional system of the Ambulance Service. And as a general rule, you will not go far in the ASNSW by doing the honest and ethical thing. The ASNSW way of management is by bullying people.

There needs to be accountability and transparency with the management of the ASNSW, as at present there is none. Anytime there is an issue it gets swept under the carpet, whether it's a complaint that's deemed 'too hard', or something as extreme as suicide or a murder-suicide. The ASNSW has had many warnings prior to any of these incidences, and each one was mismanaged. They still don't want to be held accountable to any of this, a spokeswoman from the Ambulance service said suicide should "not be trivialised in any way, shape or form for personal or political gain". This is a typical response from the ASNSW. How do they keep getting away with this, when will they be held accountable and there be transparency into how they have dealt with these people prior to their suicide or murder-suicide? Prior to the murder-suicide there were warnings that something was going to happen, that the officer would hurt someone one day. Quite often there were comments made by fellow on-road staff that they expected the officer to walk on station and gun everyone down, and there would be a massacre on an Ambulance station. Nothing was done. The officer wasn't given the appropriate support that they needed, and other officers were not protected against this officer either. The whole management of this issue was not dealt with effectively; they were warned by on-road staff. I hope that the police or this enquiry investigates into the matter behind the actions of this murder-suicide, and that the ASNSW are held accountable to some degree into what's happened here. I cannot think of any other workplace ever getting away with all this. People cannot find the words to express how wrong it all is, people outside the job (let alone inside) are in disbelief, it's almost like management are getting away with murder themselves, they have played a hand in all of this, they have blood on their own hands. They will do whatever they can to wash their hands and hide any evidence that will connect them with staff members dying by violent suicides, hangings and shooting themselves and others. If something isn't done about this, this will not be the last suicide, or murder suicide in the ASNSW. This has been going on for years, and the political cover up continues. I am sure the health minister would not want any of this to get out into the public as to them it would be seen as an attempt to undermine public confidence in the health system. The public already know how bad the public health system is...but as to how bad it is, is yet to be disclosed. The government is struggling to keep a lid on a pot that's about to explode. The politicians are even using the Ambulance Corporate Survey as a political tool, rather than seeing what's really happening and doing anything about it. The survey is true, a lot of staff do not believe the ASNSW deal effectively with bullying and

harassment, and that they believe the government or the ASNSW is not managing their issues. Ambulance Officers/Paramedics do feel stressed, overworked and undervalued. Even the ASNSW media do not promote and have their officers valued.

When working as an Officer, I often observed District Officers who stopped in at Ambulance stations; disclose personal and confidential information to all who were on station. I learnt from this never to trust them or tell them anything. The problem I could see with this is that you are required to tell area office (chain of command) information of a personal nature and if there were problems, etc. You could guarantee that this would get around and you would be labelled with it and laughed at, or if it involved trouble with another officer, you were concerned it would get back to them and create more problems. And if this created more strife and tension, management would then sweep the issue under the carpet and hope it would go away. Every officer was aware of this, or learnt the hard way, hence learning not to trust management.

I was often an ear for other officers on the road as I believe in confidentiality and privacy, as well as all the other policies in place. Everyone deserves to be treated as you would like to be treated. I have heard of the trouble other officers went through either with management or other work colleagues. And the underlying themes are always the same. And yes, officers would be and are afraid to speak up as history knows what happens if you do. There is no privacy and confidentiality, there is a history bullying officers to keep them quiet, and the repercussions of speaking up often leads to isolation, more bullying, harassment, intimidation, using IPS against the officer, "health questing" them, and any other hoops they can throw at them to make life difficult. This usually drives sane people insane, and hence to cope they develop drug and alcohol abuse, commit suicide or as recently shown by a murder-suicide by an officer.

The hierarchy system needs to be held accountable for their actions. They know the system and they are good at covering things up, this is corruption. They don't acknowledge problems as they don't want to be held accountable. The culture within the ASNSW is suppressive and oppressive which causes a depressive response and an abusive cycle continues. If officers are scared to make submissions, despite assurances their identity could be protected, then there needs to be questions raised as to why, and get to the bottom of this, otherwise as I mentioned previously, this will not be the last officer violently taking their life or the life of another.

Within the job, officers are also being given more responsibility with no support and are hung out to dry if something goes wrong. The protocols and pharmacology's are

continuously being updated and changed without much supervision on how officers integrate or applying this on-road. The pressures are increasing, the pay rate is extremely low, and the moral continues to fall. Officers never receive praise; they only hear from management if something goes wrong or if they are in trouble. There is no support physically, emotionally or psychologically to these professional life-saving, hard working brilliant people who deserve acknowledgement, and be respected like any other person in society, why are they being treated like they don't matter?

It will not change unless an independent body comes in and give the whole management structure an overhaul, and put policies in place that management MUST adhere to or be dismissed. At present the whole system is corrupt and no one trusts management let alone other staff members. I have worked in other workplaces and the ASNSW is unique, it constantly lets down its staff and constantly undervalues, undermines and makes them feel worthless. It would challenge any person's sanity, and drive people to do things that they wouldn't normally do. The culture is back to front, where what's normally right is wrong, and what's normally wrong is right, you can easily lose sense of what's appropriate if you don't keep check of yourself.

This is not an exhaustive list of issues and/or problems, I am sure other officers and ex-officers will supply submissions informing you about more, adding onto what I have written here.

Kind Regards.