

**REVIEW OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INQUIRY INTO THE
MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS OF THE AMBULANCE
SERVICE OF NSW**

Name: Mr Phil Roxburgh

Date received: 22/01/2010

Partially Confidential

20th January 2010

SUBMISSION TO THE GPSC 2 COMMITTEE OF REVIEW

I am writing to express my thoughts to the GPSC 2 Review Committee regarding the current state and future direction of the Ambulance Service of N.S.W. in light of the General Purpose Standing Committee 2 (GPSC 2) Inquiry. This submission expands on a letter forwarded to the then Premier Mr Rees and all Parliamentarians on 040909. While this submission does in part review progress post Inquiry it is also partly an overview as to how, in my opinion, the Service arrived in this position in the first place and why, despite some positive improvements, there is still much to do.

As you are aware in April 2008 I was most fortunate in being invited (in the company of Mrs Carolynne Hodder) to address the Independent Members at Parliament House in regards a letter I sent to all parliamentarians with attachments¹ expressing my dismay in regards to the way the Ambulance Executive and many Ambulance Service managers held with contempt the Service commitment to Federal and State Laws and its own Service Policies concerning bullying, harassment, intimidation and discrimination. I will be forever grateful to the Independents for instigating the GPSC 2 Inquiry as a result of this meeting. Grateful for two reasons. Firstly the Labor party would not be able to block this much needed Inquiry by weight of numbers. Secondly was the overwhelming relief that the hope engendered by my state wide e-mail to fellow officers "Factor non Verba" would be given a voice. What follows is an insight into the passage of time post Inquiry.

I am directing my headings below to the Government, organisations and people who I perceive have always had it within their power to have made a difference to the Ambulance Service over the years and have demonstrated little commitment to forge lasting and meaningful change.

I have learnt a lot about politics.

¹ GPSC 2 Submission 49 Phil Roxburgh

THE STATE LABOR GOVERNMENT

While some may think it a little unusual to first speak on the Government in regards an Ambulance specific Inquiry I would start with the highest authority and office of responsibility. The Ambulance Service is a State enterprise and under the direct responsibility of the Premier and Minister for Health. Let me make it very clear from the start that should someone think I am bias in my comments regarding the Government then you have seriously misjudged me. Read my original submission again and understand my focus is directed towards the blasé management practices and resultant injustices perpetrated against my colleagues by an inept ambulance management. I would seek the redress of this. Be assured had a Liberal Government been in power my pursuit of cultural change would have been just as committed.

Following the suicide of my friend and colleague Christine Hodder I resolved, as far as was possible, to get on with life while realising though I could, and would, forgive, I could never forget. In my naivety I felt sure lessons would be learnt and changes made. One has no future living in the past. It was only as the result of a call from the officer who replaced Christine alleging he also had failed to "fit in" and was himself subjected to bullying and harassment that I wrote to the then Minister for Health Reba Meagher and the Opposition Deputy Leader and Shadow Minister for Health Jillian Skinner. There was to be no reply from Ms Meagher. Ms Skinner raised the matter in Parliament in December 2007 requesting a priority discussion. The request was overturned – the Government used its numbers to block the motion. They cited the upcoming Head Review as proof of Government concern. Ms Skinner reflected the view of ambulance employees when she stated **"I am aware of the unions' and the officers' rejection of this review, which they describe as a review by bureaucrats for bureaucrats"**.

I have to put the following question of the Government. Christine's Station Officer, having defended the Service policies and directives as was my moral obligation and management role, found no support from management and was removed from his station by a letter written in collusion with management regarding a perceived disability – a matter that even to this day has still not been looked into. Christine's replacement officer received much the same treatment as Christine and had to remove himself from the station. My replacement as Station Officer had also endured the same treatment- including the hanging of a monkey from his office ceiling with his epaulettes on it and the message FIFO (Fit In or F... Off). Needless to say he was also forced to leave. Now imagine this. With this recurring background let us suppose Christine was the daughter or loved one of a politician. If one had any vestige of humanity left in their heart would one leave no stone unturned in seeking the redress of this injustice? Would you not want questions answered as to why with so many signs pointing to a bad outcome if nothing was acted upon "expeditiously", that ambulance management still failed in their duty to protect and act in an appropriate and immediate manner? It is a clear sign that society is truly on the downward spiral when politicians are more interested in their blind personal ambitions and the "party line" than justly and truly representing the people. Any one of our many recent Health Ministers with an eye on their portfolio would have been clearly aware all was not well with the Ambulance Service and yet chose to do little about it. Theirs was the power to have stopped this decline in the Service years ago and show some leadership when our own executive was patently failing. Among those who participated in the vote to block the precedence motion were the then Premier Mr Iemma, and future Premiers Rees and Keneally.

Premier Morris lemma in regards to comments I made on Nine National News, in response from a question later put to him by Simon Bouda, promised to immediately look into my concerns. Following my letter of 040909 addressed to the now "then" Premier Nathan Rees and all parliamentarians I received correspondence from the Premier (and others) that he had requested the Minister for Health to look into my concerns as outlined and reply to me. It would come as no surprise to anyone that no Health Minister, either in response to my own correspondence, or as directed to do so by the Premier in writing, including the current incumbent, has ever responded.

THE AMBULANCE EXECUTIVE

CEO Mr Greg Rochford;

Mr Rochford is a Labor Party appointee. As an administrator I am sure he is very good. However the unpleasant truth of the matter is that, in common with his other executive members, what he says is often at odds with what he does. At a recent management training course I attended in Sydney Mr Rochford stated as part of his opening address to all present that the Inquiry was "an unfortunate distraction". Perhaps he would like to elaborate on this further to the employees of the Service and the GPSC 2 Committee? To publicly dismiss an Inquiry which was the closest thing to a truly independent review this Service has had smacks of arrogance and contempt.

Ms Marion O'Connell;

Ms O'Connell is the head of the Services Professional Standards & Conduct Unit. In numerous submissions to the Inquiry it was noted her position seemed more to protect the executive than reveal the truth. It should come as no surprise that she is also a Labor Party Councillor in the electorate of Canada Bay. Of all the executive positions her position was the most pivotal and advantageous to bring about a cultural change - if she had the backing of a CEO and State Superintendent who went beyond the rhetoric and had the courage to live up to the practical applications of their job descriptions. Has she learnt anything as a result of the Inquiry? Comments attributed to her in the Inner West Courier newspaper perhaps best sum up the case. **"The Canada Bay Labor Councillor Marion O'Connell has described as "muckraking" claims made in NSW Parliament that the NSW Ambulance mishandled the case of a female ambulance officer who committed suicide in 2005."** A Parliamentary Inquiry released last week accused Ms O'Connell and the NSW Ambulance Service management of **"gross negligence, dismissive and aggressive conduct"** in dealing with Christine Hodder.... From my point of view it sounds like muckraking" Ms O'Connell said. **"I am upset, very upset and disappointed."**²

State Superintendent Mike Willis;

This man is our uniformed head. He delivered the immortal lines to me by way of explanation in response to my colleague's death as a result of bullying, harassment and intimidation by saying "these things happen in other organisations you know". The State Superintendent used to be seen as the figure of authority and leadership in the Service. That has mostly come to pass.

² Inner West Courier Newspaper 24 July 2008.

SERVICE INITIATIVES (mostly "Creative Inertia") resulting from Inquiry;

As part of her submission to the Inquiry **"Professor Picone informed the Committee that management training will be compulsory for all current managers, and that 400 operational managers will be trained by the end of 2009. Professor Picone added that the training will be escalated through to senior regional management teams also".³**

Effective change in an organisation must start from, and be led by, those from the top. Make the foundation firm and the rest of the structure will be well grounded. It makes absolutely no sense to first train operational managers. Why attempt to change a culture by starting with mainly lower management? Most of them have been around too long and have witnessed so much of what was reported, in part, to the Inquiry that it does not make any sense to expect them to return to their staff and relate that the same executive who previously demonstrated little or no commitment are now saying they really, really, mean to do something about it this time. They would be laughed at by most. Let me make one thing very clear. We DO have some VERY GOOD SENIOR MANAGERS in the service. We also have an entrenched boys club. How could one possibly expect real change under the same leadership which has demonstrably failed for years? This is another opportunity gone begging. In my opinion Professor Picone has it wrong. It has been established that the executive and many senior managers have either little understanding of management in light of the Service's policies and procedures or have an unwillingness, or inability, to take any responsibility for enforcing them. The training should have started from the top. A good opportunity lost, money unwisely spent. An initiative largely wasted.

The Professor also stated **"...that NSW Health has a "zero tolerance" of bullying in the workplace".⁴** A very brave assertion in light of the documented failures of the executive and some managers in its implementation as reported to the Inquiry. Most officers have now undertaken Respectful Workplace Training. A "Healthy Workplace" taskforce has been set up. In themselves these things are very good. Many of the Inquiry recommendations are being carried out. So why are many still disillusioned?.....because we still have the same executive who will never be trusted in light of previous and continuing failures. This compliance is seen by many staff as a cynical political exercise by the executive of "ticking the boxes." The Inquiry report went on to state **"While Ambulance Service employees need to be encouraged to speak out against bullying and harassment, this does not appear feasible in the current climate of the Service."** ⁵ This Inquiry and these initiatives have not given the Leopard new spots.

SYSTEMS FAILURES

"Any organisation that provides a vital service to the community must have systems in place for self analysis. Such systems must be able to identify a poor outcome or a critical incident. Only by implementing a system of review, examining failings and making changes can there be some

³ Legislative Council. The Management and Operations of the Ambulance Service of NSW, *General Purpose Standing Committee No.2* Report 27. 2008 at 3.149.

⁴ Ibid, 3.133.

⁵ Ibid. 3.82.

guarantee that systemic or individual failings can be addressed. This is a responsibility of the Senior Management of the Service....”⁶

The executive repeatedly fails to either recognise or acknowledge serious shortcomings in the Service. Such was the case with Christine Hodder; such was the case with young David Iredale whose life was tragically lost in the Blue Mountains. Neither are isolated cases. It has been accepted practise by senior management that if one does nothing it will “all go away”.

“I confess that I was astonished that at no time after the death of David Iredale or any time leading up to the announcement of this inquest, did the Ambulance Service of New South Wales conduct an appropriate review and/or analysis of their performance in the circumstances leading to David’s death.”⁷

Very few people within the Service would have been astonished. The Coroner did not investigate Christine’s death; no one apparently expected a review of David’s.

It must be acknowledged that in the area of “systems failure” the Service Executive could learn much from the Ambulance Education Unit. This is one of the things they do very well. There is an honest admission and understanding that all may sometimes not go as planned and a looking to continuously improve clinical intervention. By gathering intelligence in a non threatening manner they encourage the reporting of perceived potential problems and respond in a measured and timely manner. This is of great benefit to the officers in the field and is reflected in the first rate treatment provided by them to the people in this state.

As the Ambulance Executive continues to demonstrate so well, in the absence of self analysis, system failures continue to occur. The management of this Service need to be proactive—not reactive. It should not be the job of the Deputy Coroner to state obvious and basic management principles to our Executives. As so tragically shown in the David Iredale case this failure to manage not only affects ambulance employees. It affects the public.

THE HEALTH SERVICES UNION EXECUTIVE (NOT our Service uniformed reps)

Now to the people who gave us the slogan “your rights at work, worth fighting for!”

When the whistle blew they were nowhere to be seen. If Sharon Burrows wants to know why union membership continues to decline then the H.S.U. would provide a good (non) working example. Such was the overwhelming response to my e-mail “Factor Non Verba” forwarded to all Ambulance employees and the burden of responsibility I felt as a result of staff replies I sent an e-mail to the H.S.U. General Secretary Mr Michael Williamson asking for his urgent and immediate assistance. I know some of our uniformed reps also brought my plight to the attention of the H.S.U. Silence was to be my only reply. It was not until after the announcement of the Inquiry and the subsequent media attention that the H.S.U. reluctantly found voice. Why the lack of enthusiasm? I would like to know why on an issue as important and pervasive as the gross mismanagement of the Service and the contempt in which the Service held many of the unions own members that Mr Williamson could

⁶ Coroner’s Inquest Into The Death Of David Iredale 120

⁷ Coroner’s Inquest Into The Death Of David Iredale 118

not even deign me with a cursory reply. I guess when you hold a number of important roles within the Labor Party including State Labor Party Senior Vice - President and National Labor Party President you could be forgiven for having more important things on one's mind. H.S.U. members (of which I was one for decades) need to recognise the cold political reality that Mr Williamson has direct access to the Labor Party Hierarchy and could have effected a change to this Service many years ago. He did not have to speak empty words to the Service Employees at the protest rally outside Parliament House calling for strike action to affect the removal of the CEO. Service employees are sick of empty rhetoric, both Service and Union. When will members awake to the reality of the truth that we are spectators to a stage-managed play being played out in collusion between the Government, Union and the Ambulance Executive? It is the tangible we would see, not more promises that never see the light of day. He could have had a quiet chat to Premier lemma, Rees or Keneally and have received a fair hearing. It has always astounded me that while the HSU is prepared to see our Service "done over" by the Government and the Service Executive (pay and conditions, Rescue ect.), many employees are still happy to allow the HSU to channel large amounts of our contributions to support the ALP. No doubt the HSU Executive will engage in bellicose barking and bang tables and point to many things they have done to help its members. I would not deny much of this. Let me suggest however that the days when Union executives had the high ideals of standing up for the working class have largely been replaced by people more interested in taking their place in state or federal politics. The saying in scripture that you cannot serve two masters is as true today as it ever was.

In the minutes of the HSU state wide delegates meeting 180608 it stated in part **"there was some concern that the Upper House Review may have been initiated for the political benefit of the Opposition in Parliament..."** Really? The GPSC 2 was initiated as a result of some non-entity (myself) who having failed to get support to assist his fellow colleagues from the Service, his Union, or the then Premier and Health Minister was handed a lifeline by the Rev. Dr. Gordon Moyes and the Independents of State Parliament. This was as a result of a direct plea by e-mail I made to all Parliamentarians for help. As you know the Independents have the balance of power in the Upper House. I will be forever thankful for their help.

It is of interest, by way of comparison, and to negate perceived union bias (I am a believer in the genuine Union movement) that whenever a construction worker is injured or killed on the job who is a member of the C.F.M.E.U. there is immediate, high profile, and appropriate action by the Union - as there should be. When will the Ambulance Unions decide enough ambulance employees and families have been destroyed and decide to do something meaningful? Perhaps this would be a more appropriate use by the HSU of our contributions as opposed to propping up a terminal Government who are in turn propping up an ailing Ambulance Executive?

It may come as a revelation to many to realise that along with WorkCover, Unions have the power to commence proceedings against an employer for an offence against the OH&S Act 2000 (http://austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consul_act/ohasa2000273/s106.html). Surprised? I certainly was. It would have to be one of the H.S.U.'s best kept secrets. (In one of life's ironies the Federal Government is currently working on legislation to remove this power from Unions). Have we not had enough lives destroyed yet for the Union to have initiated such an investigation into any one of numerous cases? With all the allegations over many years relating to the dysfunctions of this Service especially in relation to bullying, harassment and intimidation, and the confirmation of this during

many inquiries, it would have to be put to the union why have they not acted on this legislation? The answer could only be political. I could not believe it was just stupidity.

Such is the level of disquiet in the service regarding the duplicity of the H.S.U. hierarchy that having had enough, officers finally were driven to stop just coming to work and being content to complain and decided for the first time to unite and do something about it. The result is that uniformed officers now have the opportunity to be represented, should they choose, by an Association (EMSPA N.S.W.) which has been started by paramedics for the sole benefit of paramedics. Belatedly the H.S.U. executive must now realise we are more than just an expensive public relations unit of their Union.

WORKCOVER

At the end of this paragraph I would refer you to the attachments from the newspaper "Cowra Guardian" to be read in attachment order. The first attachment "A" is a front page article attributed to a WorkCover "spokesperson" in regards a "lengthy investigation" into the Cowra Ambulance station. The attachment "B" is a reasonable piece of editorialist journalism and asks some pretty fair questions. Being made aware of the editorial I was moved to make reply. Please refer to attachment "C".

WorkCover is the authority responsible for the regulation and oversight of workplace safety compliance. It therefore left me in a state of bewilderment that the report in the newspaper from the unnamed WorkCover informant was about as factual and thoroughly researched as the Ambulance Service report into the death of Christine Hodder. It states in part **"...all ambulance officers stationed at Cowra at the time of Christine Hodder's death, plus others at the station afterwards, were interviewed by its officers"**. It repeated the assertion at the end of the article. **"We interviewed all."**⁸ Would it surprise anyone to know I have never been approached, let alone interviewed, by anyone from WorkCover? If the investigation was as comprehensive as we would be led to believe then I guess it was just an unhappy circumstance that one officer suicided who was enduring her second betrayal at the hands of management to do anything to stop rampant bullying against her perpetrated by her colleagues. It was also unfortunate that the S/O who supported his officer and upheld the Service policies was removed (with collusion from management) on the grounds of disability discrimination. And the officers who took both Christine's and my place both left citing bullying. Is it possible one could be so astonishingly blind as to stretch credibility to the point where one believed this was pure coincidence? Following allegations made in regards the bullet holes in the station and the monkey hung from the Station Officers office ceiling dressed in his epaulettes with the message FIFO attached to it I can only surmise WorkCover finds it acceptable practise to have in your possession, and discharge, firearms at your workplace and threaten staff who "don't fit in". Four Officers had gone from a station in a short period all citing bullying, harassment and intimidation and WorkCover find **"no evidence supporting the claims of harassment?"** It beggars belief.

The WorkCover hierarchy need to get their own house in order in regards workplace bullying and then perhaps they will be in a position to see more clearly the truth of what is happening in other agencies.

⁸ Cowra Guardian 160708

MY OWN JOURNEY

You hear some pretty wild stories from time to time about political networking, old boys clubs, and “payback”. Often you relegate them to the “paranoia” realm and think such things never happen. Many people warned me they would make me pay for being the first to “rat out in the ranks”. I did, however, think the Service would have kept its head low and wait until it was established as to whether the GPSC 2 Review would go ahead. Either someone erroneously told them the Review was not going to happen or I (again) seriously underestimated the woeful stupidity and arrogance of “people in high places”.

I still receive calls from people relating bad experiences. I will therefore reluctantly use my own story as an example as to how far the Service has progressed post Inquiry so as not to expose others to possible retribution. I wish to request the shaded area below to be suppressed from public view. I will not publicly speak on the behaviour of one of my officers. While I consider his conduct reprehensible he was only permitted by management inaction to further his own agenda – and, many suspect, managements.

[Next 7 paragraphs omitted by Secretariat, as requested by author]

From this point I would wish the submission to again become public.

I was disempowered by an A/DM who refused to act "expeditiously" and support one of his managers. During this time I desperately sought information from my D/O and two Acting D/O's as to what the A/DM was doing about this case. The issue commenced in early December 2008, and was taken in charge by the A/DM in the January. It was not until 26th APRIL!! 2009 that the A/DM eventually interviewed the officer. Would you have then expected that the outcome of this belatedly held meeting be communicated to the managers? The answer is an obvious yes-very basic management practise. A performance management plan for the officer in light of his behaviour? -of course! (I am willing to provide a paperwork trail on a confidential basis to the Committee).

It will come as no surprise to anyone following this Inquiry that none of this happened. The A/DM never communicated the outcome of this meeting to me. The D/O also informed me he was also not made aware. In June, no longer able to tolerate the management isolation and the stress of seeing my staff suffer and my own health decline I placed a workplace claim for recurrence of stress injury citing failure of the A/DM to meaningfully enact the service policies and Déjà Vu. It was all

happening to me again. Following the Cowra debacle the words attributed to Carl Marx seemed appropriate to the situation-“the first time is tragedy, the second time is farce”. I was informed months later by P.S.C.U. by way of mitigation that the A/DM informed them he did speak seriously to the officer at interview. If he indeed did it had no effect. Not only was I never informed of the outcome, there was no change in the officer’s behaviour or compliance to the award.

I was to find if one criticises a manager in high places it is amazing how “expeditiously” they respond. I heard from the A/DM via e-mail (he has never spoken to me) almost immediately I lodged the WorkCover claim. No conversation in his first two e-mails, just attachments which had little meaningful bearing on the point in case. When I forwarded him a courteous reply and suggested I hoped he had not made his assumptions based on the attachments the reply was interesting. We are taught as managers, and as a basic courtesy, not to send e-mails with words in continuous capitals. It is discourteous and indicates one is shouting. I guess that is something only junior managers are expected to respect. Further to this, and most amazingly, despite proof of bullying and a failure of the officer to carry out his full duties as per the award, the A/DM told me to “roll with it!!” I was staggered. I thought of the two female officers who had contacted me within a week of each other and gave me the impetus to stand up and attempt to effect change within this Service. One alleged attempted rape; the other had a male colleague threaten to assault her. Should I have just told them to “role with it”? I guess I need to toughen up more.

Is it possible that a man in his position could be so inept in staff management skills? It has been pointed out to me that the A/DM is good friends with the State Superintendent. While I believe this manager’s grasp of the basic tenants of management practice is tenuous many others have suggested it is deliberate. The A/DM on his return from annual leave will be promoted to act in the position of the Divisional Manager. As at Cowra, the only one who will suffer adversely for their actions will be myself. I was never naive enough to believe this would not happen and always knew there would be a cost. On the evidence of my treatment by this A/DM and from speaking to other concerned officers most of the Service hierarchy is no more serious in putting an end to bullying and effectively managing its staff than it was pre Inquiry.

The Acting Head of P.S.C.U. was notified of my concerns in June last year and commenced an investigation into my allegations. She has been very supportive but I am still awaiting the final written findings.

I will not bore you further with other failures suffice to say staff support service provision is still as silent as ever and the term “ambulance rehab” as applied by this service is an oxymoron.

In the Inquiry findings under the sub-heading “Criticism of managers” (2.16) the committee indicated **“They were also critical of the apparent unwillingness or incapacity of managers to deal effectively with difficult situations or people.”** Nothing has changed. To quote the title of a Pink Floyd song our executive and many upper managers have become “Comfortably Numb”.

SUMMARY.

My colleagues and I were very appreciative of the committee effort. However when the submission was handed down it would be fair to say that most were left feeling underwhelmed. Report fatigue in this job coupled with low morale would suggest to me the Inquiry will receive far fewer Review submissions. It was reported in the media that the draft inquiry called for the replacement of the Service Executive but this was stymied by the Government committee members. Why?

In the Inquiry report it is stated **"To date, the Chief Executive of the Ambulance Service of NSW has failed to implement much needed reforms to solve the fundamental cultural and management problems within the service, even though he has been aware of these problems for over a decade. The inaction of the senior executive team has also played a significant role in the current state of the Service's affairs."**⁹ Why were these people not moved to other positions more suited to their talents? I think it a very poor decision when having so clearly identified the failings of the current executive they are left in place. When these managers have presided over the decline of the service for so many years it is now too late for the CEO to put his hand up and now say **"What is clear to us from the feedback we are getting from ambulance officers is that there is a need now to focus our reform agenda on the arrangements we have in place to support paramedics in their workplace...I want to emphasise that we are taking these issues very seriously ...our priorities need to be focused more on the way we provide, as an organisation, support to paramedics and other staff in their workplace."**¹⁰ This is nonsense. Corporate surveys commenced in 2000 and have been on a downward spiral since. It is way too late for his credibility with staff, as confirmed by many submissions to the Inquiry, to say that now the emphasis can move more to staff support. And where one has to ask is the results of a completed 2009 corporate survey? Will the executive make this document public to the Inquiry and its employees immediately or will we be told it was only for "in house" consumption?

The executive will point to the fact that seemingly meaningful changes are now happening. As a foundation to such a cultural change as is needed in our Service the first premise would be for the employees to have confidence in their leadership. It is no use after so many years at the helm and following such a damning Inquiry Report that the current executive members could ever claim this confidence. Employee morale has hit rock bottom and just when you thought things could not become worse we are now excavating! To go forward we need to be led by a fresh team who not only have good leadership abilities but a vision for the future direction of the Service that can inspire and harness the energy of all its employees and lead us forward united. We need leadership with courage of conviction, resolution, and fairness, tempered where necessary with empathy. People have had enough of mere theory. The only reasons I could proffer for these people still being in their current positions of authority after such a negative report are political. I certainly would not envision this happening in the private competitive sector.

Let me once again make one thing very clear. I am not pursuing this issue out of any feeling of vindictiveness or spite. The executive members are undoubtedly talented people in many areas and I am sure in their own way having done much that is good. I do however feel that it is now time they put the interest of the Service above their own. There are other areas of Health where their

⁹ Ibid. 2.37.

¹⁰ Ibid, 2.33.

undoubted particular talents can be put to good use. There is always a cost in putting others needs above your own. Believe me. Sometimes it is just something you have to do.

I would not leave you believing it is however all doom and gloom. The new Acting Head of the P.S.C.U. on current form and from personal experience is certainly a step in the right direction. If she can enthuse her staff to follow her example and the department is adequately resourced then I have some hope for the future of the P.S.C.U. As earlier mentioned there is positive movement in other departments and we do have some gifted managers who have a commitment to see meaningful change. Unless however they prostitute their high ideals and become politically aligned (read "old boys club") there is only so far they will be allowed to progress. This culture must be changed.

During the course of these events I have been contacted by many people from all walks of life citing similar problems in their workforce and schools. I was surprised on later reflection that all people who have contacted me had one thing in common. They all worked for the government. Doctors, nurses, police, corrective services, WorkCover employees, teachers..... When is the Government going to step up to the mark and do something comprehensive to stem this madness? To handle the issue in a piecemeal fashion will not suffice. It is not just an Ambulance specific issue. Bullying and harassment are becoming endemic in society. First and foremost bullying, intimidation, discrimination and harassment are illegal. It is no longer enough for Governments to cite their own policies and empty rhetoric during "media bites" for the sedation of the masses. The people are becoming fatigued and cynical of empty posturing. As with the Ambulance Executive much "spin" is heard but little is acted upon meaningfully. This has to stop. I would have to ask is there anyone heroic enough in the Labor Party to demonstrate leadership and, standing in a spirit of co-operation, seek to work together with the Opposition and Independents of Parliament in a united apolitical stand against this tyranny? Or is this issue to continue to be more about scoring points and towing the party line? It could just provide the very opportunity to help restore some public respect in a political system that many see as putting self interest and Party before the interests of the people. If you think I overstate the case then ask yourself why are Independent Parliamentary members on the increase? If politicians cannot work this out then I suggest you ask a working man on the street.

Finally the committee stated **"The Committee is not prepared to have this report swept under the carpet like so many other reports, or to ignore the pleas from hundreds of ambulance officers who have contributed to this Inquiry."** ¹¹

Our plea? Please, give us the leadership we deserve.

Sincerely Yours,

Phil Roxburgh.

¹¹ Ibid, 2.36.

P.S.

I would appreciate a public indulgence over the Cowra reporting. There are only two people left at Cowra who were stationed there during the time of both Christine Hodder and myself. All the other officers are new to Cowra and made it their home with their families. They are, on all reports, excellent officers, and neither they nor their families deserve the public anger some have directed at the Cowra Ambulance Station. No one who has ever suffered from the truly abhorrent treatment that bullying is will ever forget, but if they are to survive they must forgive. It should be remembered that bullies only thrive when equally weak people allow them. I would ask that readers of this and my previous submission please hear my wish to treat these people with respect. Thank you.

Report cleared service

16/07/2008 9:28:00 AM

WorkCover NSW says it has found no evidence to support any

allegations of harassment and bullying by officers at the Cowra Ambulance Station.

Officers from the government body conducted their own lengthy investigation into the claims surrounding the station, its working environment and the death of Christine Hodder in 2005.

Christine Hodder's family have made submissions to a parliamentary inquiry alleging bullying and harassment were a factor in her taking her life.

A spokesperson for WorkCover NSW said all ambulance officers stationed at Cowra at the time of Christine Hodder's death, plus others at the station afterwards, were interviewed by its officers.

"They found quite the opposite [to the allegations currently being published by the Sydney Morning Herald]," the spokesperson said.

"There was no evidence supporting the claims of harassment. They found staff who were supportive of each other."

The WorkCover NSW investigation eventually produced a 20 page document, compiled and researched over several months.

It was instigated from a complaint by a male employee at the

station in early 2007.

The investigation was conducted by several officers; the majority however, by a female WorkCover officer.

"It was a very detailed investigation," the spokesperson said.

"It took several months for it to be completed and the finding handed down, due to the fact many staff members had moved away from the station on transfers.

"We interviewed all."

The Cowra Guardian has asked for an official statement from the CEO of WorkCover NSW regarding the allegations and its investigation.

Comments

No comments yet. Be the first to comment below.

Post A Comment

Ambulance officer in centre of submissions responds to question

18/07/2008 9:19:00 AM
The editor,

My name is Phil Roxburgh and I was the late Christine Hodder's Station Officer at Cowra.

In reply to your column "What we say" (Cowra Guardian 16th July).

If your readers would like some understanding as to what a person goes through who suffers bullying, intimidation and harassment and the efforts taken by myself to manage this then I would hope you would take the time to read my parliamentary

submission.

I have not hidden behind anonymity.

It can be found on the NSW parliamentary website, submission No. 49 under my name.

I am still a serving ambulance officer and I have made the career destroying decision to speak out against this alleged abhorrent and pitiful behaviour and the, in my opinion, demonstrated lack by our executive to enforce the services so called "zero tolerance" policy. I have heard many horrific stories and I believe can no longer abide doing nothing while many of my colleagues and their families suffer.

This submission and the actions leading to it were not the action of a vindictive and bitter person against his former colleagues. I would have reacted three years ago were that the case.

In my opinion, bullying, harassment and intimidation is only allowed to propagate when our managers do nothing.

Rhetoric and lip service are not sufficient. Maggie Thatcher spoke words to the effect "see nothing, do nothing, be nothing". I decided to do something.

My decision to pursue a parliamentary inquiry was brought about by the continuing traumas being experienced by my fellow employees and the failure, I believe, of our upper management to effectively act.

This has been borne out by the receiving of over two hundred submissions to the inquiry.

Many were related directly to this systemic problem. It is also worth noting that neither Christine nor I were ever approached by anyone identifying themselves as a Work Cover officer.

Nothing can be gained from this exercise to help those who will always feel Christine's loss. Nothing can be gained for me.

We can by this action however attempt to effect a cultural change in this service whereby officers are provided with a safe workplace and both they and their families are protected from the tragedy of this behaviour which effect's [sic] not only the employee, but their whole family.

Let me also pay testimony to Christine's courage.

I have found from experience you only find out the true value of a friendship when the relationship is tested in the furnace. Most fail and desert you. Christine did not. I urge you to read the submission.

Sincerely Yours, Phil Roxburgh.

Comments

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