

Submission
No 73

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

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Partially Confidential

To Whom It May Concern:

There are many things that I would like to put forward to the committee, but I feel overwhelmed with all the issues that I have faced that I feel it simpler to just tell some of my story of employment with the ASNSW.

I attribute this success to unquestioning work ethic, hard work and very importantly support and recognition of my efforts by my employer. As a result of this extra effort was put into my work as I was proud of the recognition I had received. Without my extra efforts the above result would never have happened. This is the result of good management culminating in a win/win situation. My employer had happy workers prepared to put in the extra effort resulting in greater profits. Good employees were recognised, rewarded via increased responsibility and/or promotion, and they actually enjoyed going to work.

I decided to join the ASNSW and went through the six month process of getting my application in. Recruitment was once a year then so if you were unsuccessful there was a long turn around time before being able to re apply. I managed to get to the assessment stage with my first application, and then experienced my first exposure to Management of the ASNSW. There were approximately 30 applicants at this assessment that was held at _____ Of those 30 applicants a mere three got through to the next stage which was an aptitude test of _____

Of the three that entered this stage only one was to emerge and went on to attend the training school at Rozelle. The 27 that did not make it through to the second stage on the day were lined up and given a speech on how there job was to recruit and that they wanted to employ us but were sorry that we had not made it through. Now I can only speak for myself and another applicant who came from the same town as I did but we both failed by one point in the first stage (they are also still in the ASNSW). When we were sat down to go through the exam there were at least five occasions where I could have been awarded another point which would have allowed me to pass. An example is where we were given photo copies of a street directory page and asked to go from point A to point B along the fastest possible route. I 'failed' the answer as I was told I had gone up a one way street the wrong way. When I challenged the fact I was wrong and showed the uniformed officer going through the answers with me the route I took on the photo copy supplied, she agreed that the route I had taken was in fact correct. When she then questioned supervisor regarding this she was abruptly told not to interfere and that the question would remain wrong. The problem was that the photo copy had reproduced the one way arrow on the street in question as a blurred blob that was undefinable. I was not allowed to take my copy of the map, despite every other applicant being allowed to take there clear copies, so that I had no grounds upon which to appeal.

After having driven 200km and taken a day off work, I left there very angry, and vowed never to apply again.

Time got the better of me; I calmed down and did re-apply for the next intake, after having been encouraged by current Ambulance Officers from my home town. The overall process involved in the recruitment took over a year. I managed to pass all the requirements and was told that I would have to await allocation to a starting class. One of the poor things with the way this was handled is that you were only given a maximum of four weeks notice, usually less, that you were starting a class. I asked if I could be given more notice that this as I wished to do the right thing with my current employer and give them adequate notice of my intention to leave. This was not forthcoming and ended up having to give less than four weeks notice for the management position I was leaving, something that to this day upsets me.

I was finally contacted by Officer [redacted] from Rozelle recruitment and was told a position was available and that I would be sent to [redacted] to do my on road training and Probationary period. As I was living in [redacted] at the time I asked if there was anything a little closer to home. Officer [redacted] asked me to leave it with him. He rang back a couple of hours later and told me that there was not anything closer but that if I took up this offer I would be trained at and then

As it had taken so long to get to this stage I accepted the offer.

From the time of first applying to starting at Rozelle was over two years!!

At the training school at Rozelle one of the things that was constantly said to us was 'it's a great job as long as you don't get involved in the politics'. This was the beginning of the grooming of staff not to question management and to accept your lot within the service.

Later in your Probation period when it came close to going back to Rozelle for the second stage of the in house training you are told what station you will be sent to as your first permanent posting. For anyone with a family this process was very harsh as you were given once again four weeks notice of where you would be sent. While still working on road for two week and then returning to Rozelle full time for the last two weeks you are expected to find accommodation, organise the move and relocate your spouse and any children to the new town. This would, I imagine, place enormous strain on your family life. For me as a single person with no children, at the time, this was less traumatic, but traumatic all the same. When other officers in my class asked for assistance they were told that ASNSW had employed them and not their family and that they had to deal with it. Would it have been difficult for the Service to 'manage' the allocation of permanent stations earlier to become more family friendly?

At this stage the Services reputation for not being family friendly was proving to be true.

This amounted to a week for living in a hovel that would have been condemned had it been located in any major town. No subsidised rent like all the other government workers in town. Police paid \$5.00 a week for proper housing, Teachers had there own purpose built new brick houses that were rent free

I believed that, as I was told, if I did not cause waves that I would be at for two years and should be able to move easily as I had done the right thing. As a result I did not start applying for other positions straight away. Despite this other officers that were stationed there were 'getting out' as the squeaky wheel was getting the grease. Numerous 'extenuating' circumstances were employed by other officers who were stationed at _____ to get out.

_____, this Officer was then given a choice of stations in the location they desired. The list goes on.

While still at [redacted] I had to return to Rozelle for the final part of my training to become a Qualified Ambulance Officer. One of the new skills just introduced was that of allowing Level 3 officers the ability to cannulate. As part of becoming qualified to cannulate unsupervised you had to do 10 cannulations on road while supervised by a level 4 or 5 officer. This was obviously going to pose a problem at [redacted] as there were only level 2 officers. As a result I took the initiative to organise a

[redacted] so I could get the supervised cannulations and return to [redacted] fully qualified in cannulation. All I needed was for Management to authorise the shifts. I was told that it would not happen as they did not want to pay for one day's overtime at [redacted] to replace me for the one work day I would be absent. So as a result I returned to [redacted] fully trained in cannulation but unable to perform the task due to a lack of supervision.

[redacted] I was unable to do even one cannulation. I did a private course in cannulation run by [redacted] ...this was not recognised by the ASNSW and I was still forbidden to cannulate. It was not until an Ambulance Officer, who was a friend of mine,

[redacted] organised for me to go to [redacted] Hospital and work in Theatre putting in cannulas under the supervision of an Anaesthetist. In one afternoon I got over 20 cannulas in and became qualified finally. A community was deprived of an important procedure that could have been performed by me, for [redacted] due to Managerial ineptitude.

Despite all of this my private life was going through hard times. My wife, just prior to me being transferred to [redacted] had [redacted] and despite applying for [redacted] to be closer to me, ended up being posted back at [redacted]. She had to sign an agreement to stay there for three years after which she could apply for a transfer. This meant that I had to try and get back to that area via the Ambulance Service as the trip to see each other took 12hrs each way meaning we only saw each other three times a year. I consider that I have a strong work ethic and not wanting to become a 'squeaky wheel' I did not use this as leverage to get out of [redacted] but I let management know of my situation. They did not attempt in anyway help me with my situation. I was at [redacted] for [redacted] years before I managed to get out.

During my time at [redacted] I applied for a total of 20+ positions before a successful application to [redacted] station, still 4hrs from [redacted] but the best I could do. The application process employed by the ASNSW showed up its weakness during

my 20+ applications. At no time was there any recognition or reward for having spent time in an 'unpopular' posting similar to that used by Teachers, Police, Nurses, and National Parks Officers and so on. When you apply for a position you have to get onto a short list, after which you would then have to, if required, go for an interview. If your application was unsuccessful you were then able to get feedback on your application as to where you went wrong. In real life what would happen is that on the selection committee would be the District Officer and the Station Officer of the station you were applying for. Any decisions they made did not have to be justified and nepotism was rife. Some of the 'feedback' I received from the same District Officer was I had not elaborated enough, in the next application he told me "we did not want a War and Peace"! Also the standards required are not consistent between different areas. On one application I applied for a highly sort after position at [redacted] and came in the top 5 applicants after competing against some of the best Ambos in the service. With EXACTLY the same application I applied for a relief position a [redacted] The only difference was the Job number for the application and the word [redacted] replaced with [redacted] is not a location or position anywhere near as competitive as [redacted] yet with the same application I failed to get one of the four positions on offer and was not even one of the twelve officers that were placed on a reserve list, to be given a position should one arise within the next twelve months. The positions went to junior officers who had not spent any time [redacted] and come from Sydney. One officer's mother, I found out later, lived next door to the recruiting District Officer. Nepotism? Can't be proved but I understand that the successful Officers mother spent a lot of time at the District Officers house! How can the same application get me in the top 5 of a highly sought after position yet not even rank me in the top 16 for a lower ranked position? The problem is that each D/O and subsequent S/O all had different expectations. The job of recruitment and job transfers within the Service should be dealt with by either a dedicated group of Uniformed Officers or better still by an external contractor. That way some uniformity and transparency would become the norm.

So finally on the point where I was about to resign from the Service due to being sent to [redacted] and having been forgotten, I managed to win a position at [redacted]. I spent the next year trying to get closer to my wife so we could finally get our family life on track. Eventually I managed to gain a position at [redacted] with my wife after having been apart for four years. Is the ASNSW family friendly? In my experience no. Does the ASNSW encourage and support those employees that support them. No...in fact they become the ones discriminated against. The ASNSW creates and encourages those with bad work ethics and then wonders why even the 'good' employees eventually succumb to underhanded tactics to get ahead within the Service. If you had an employee that was good at doing an undesirable job such as cleaning toilets in a restaurant, they are not doing that because they enjoy cleaning toilets, they are doing to show dedication, enthusiasm, initiative etc in the hope that it will be recognised and afford them progression within the workforce. They have a good work ethic. In the private sector this employee would be encouraged and given more responsibility and possible promotion. In the ASNSW you will be put in a back room and the door shut so that this employee remains doing what they see as a good job at something that no-one else wants to do and better still because they have a good work ethic they are not complaining. There is no such thing as support or encouragement within the ASNSW.

After your initial training within the Service they wipe their hands of your further education. All 'recertification' now has to be performed by the individual employee. They have to arrange their own education by attending lectures that have been arranged for other workforces and as such do not ever entirely address what an Ambulance Officer requires in their education. For example I have attended lectures on burns that were directed at Doctors, put on by a pharmaceutical company as a means of selling their products. It had little relevance to Ambulance work but deemed relevant as part of my 'recertification' by the ASNSW because they did not have to pay anything. To add insult to injury because of its very nature this means you have to attend in your own time. Getting time off for attending these lectures during work time can be a laborious and hit and miss exercise. If you don't do that you are given time in lieu, IF you prearrange it. The problem with that is that when you apply for reimbursement of your time in lieu it frequently is denied because it does not suit the Service. It also precludes any last minute lectures that you may hear about unless you wish to donate your own time to the Service. So the structure, as it exists now, for me to remain current as a practicing Ambulance Officer does not in any way test my knowledge of the drugs that I administer or my knowledge of the ASNSW Protocols which govern how I treat patients with given medical conditions. Both of these items are at the very core of Ambulance practice, yet after an extended period of employment I may have forgotten all the salient point, such as contraindication for administration of a specific drug, or how to treat Asthma. Despite this I would be deemed 'Certified to Practice' by the ASNSW as they do not ever test your knowledge in these areas after your initial training, which in some cases can be decades.

What is one of the things that help to retain employees? For me it would have to be the ability to progress within the bounds of your employment. Despite the willingness, ability, and desire that I and many other Officers that are employed in the country have, the ability for advancement has been taken away from them. For country Officer to progress to 'Intensive Care' Paramedic you have to apply through the already noted deficient application process. If you are successful in your application you then have to attend further training at Rozelle. The catch is that if you find the course not to your liking or you fail the course you can not return to the station you came from, your employment with the ASNSW is now located in Sydney. This condition also applies once you become qualified as an 'Intensive Care' Paramedic. So if you want to advance within the Service you must once again leave, for me, what has been a hard won position in the country with my wife and move to Sydney. This means if you are not prepared to move, clinical advancement, that the Service is willing to pay for i.e. training as an 'Intensive Care' Paramedic, requires you to be lucky enough to be stationed in the city or at one of the TWO, yes only two, rural stations of Dubbo or Wollongong that are allowed to train 'Intensive Care' Paramedics. The eagerness of Officers to progress clinically is demonstrated by the increase in skills and pharmacology's that the base line Paramedics have undertaken without anything in return. When I first joined the service I was allowed to use a blood pressure cuff, use a basic 'Heart Start' machine and five drugs one of which was Aspirin. Now, as a base line Paramedic, I am required to use the same as above except the 'Heart Start' is more complicated, I am responsible for 17 drugs, ranging up to S8 drugs, and can also cannulate and place a tube down the patients throat to assist in breathing. For this the ASNSW has provided training only, no promotion or pay increase or even mere recognition via a pat on the back. Our responsibilities are to

be increased further still in the future with the addition of further drugs and procedures. Why do it? For me personally I want to give my patients the best possible care even if I gain nothing professionally from the ASNSW. A pity the ASNSW does not care for its customers i.e. Ambulance Officer the same way, I guess that's the difference between having a work ethic and not having one in the case of the ASNSW.

I could ramble on for many more pages about the ineptitude of ASNSW management. Examples occur every day such as sending an Officer from [redacted] to [redacted] to cover Minimum Operating Levels instead of putting on overtime at [redacted]. The catch is that it is approx. a 2hr drive each way and the Officer they want to send is one hour into a six hour shift. So you would have had the Officer drive for four hours to fill in at [redacted] for an hour. Management has been seen to be covering the MOL's but in reality [redacted] is only getting 1hrs coverage. The cost of wear and tear on the vehicle plus petrol would have far outstripped the cost of overtime, but it looks better on paper...'read D/O comes in under budget and gets bonus at expense of Officer driving from [redacted] and proper Ambulance cover at [redacted]

As far a harassment and bullying I have been the victim of this and seen it on numerous occasions at the hand of our S/O as well as by other members of Management, but this has been covered by numerous others so I will leave that to their testimony. It seems that those that can do, and are on the road, and those that can't climb the Management tree.

At the end of the day I love my job, it is the only reason I am allowing the ASNSW to utilise my skills and associated work ethics. But for recognition of skills, a feeling of being appreciated, an enjoyable work place, moral, the ability to advance within the workplace, a career as opposed to a job, and a work place that is free of nepotism, harassment, and bullying, my [redacted] years of employment with the Ambulance Service of New South Wales IS the worst job that I have had in the thirty five years I have spent in the workforce.

One thing that rings inside my head is the words of departing Intensive Care Paramedic [redacted]. This man is extremely knowledgeable, motivated staff, an excellent on road practitioner who had worked on the Wespac chopper in Sydney for quite some time and was highly respected by his fellow peers throughout the State, not just at [redacted]. He left the ASNSW after 20 years of service and is now working in intensive care as a Registered Nurse. At his farewell, that was not attended by one person from management, he was given by the ASNSW a [redacted] mounted on card board with the signature of the D/O underneath. That was the culmination of 20 years service!! Anyway during his farewell speech he said:-

"Look after the person sitting the chair next to you, make them a cup of tea when you are making yours, back them up on the road, support them in their times of need and care for them, for without each other you have NOTHING in this Service, cause you sure as hell will get nothing from Management!"

After all the things I have seen over the years as an Ambo only the death of a fellow Officer to cancer has caused a tear or two. Yet I am reduced to tears as I write the above because never truer words have been said!

Thankyou for your time.

Regards,