

Submission
No 108

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

Name: MsCarolynn Hodder

Date received: 25/06/2008

Partially Confidential

Carolynn Hodder

21st June 2008

My daughter-in-law Christine Hodder was an Ambulance Officer employed at Cowra. She died on the 16th April 2005 after a long-standing unresolved period of harassment and bullying by other Cowra Ambulance Officers with whom she worked.

She took her own life by hanging herself from her daughter's swing in the family back yard. We didn't see it coming and I cannot even begin to describe the utter horror, disbelief, grief, and unbelievable sadness we feel because she isn't in our life any more. We miss her and it utterly saddens me as she will never see her beloved daughter grow up.

After the event the ambulance service contacted my son Jason (Christine's husband) saying the service would conduct an enquiry looking into Christine's death and the long term problems in the Cowra station, including Christine's two previous complaints about work place bullying and harassment. They also asked what we, as a family would like to see done (we have tapes of an interview the NSW ambulance conducted with Jason). We wanted answers and the people responsible for the harassment and ongoing abuse towards Christine to be punished. We also wanted the NSW ambulance service to at least say they were sorry and in some way responsible because they left her unsupported and ignored.

Jason was hopeful that the Ambulance Department would actually listen to what he had to say and also to acknowledge that there was a problem. He also wanted them to do something constructive about the issue to give him some peace of mind, as we realize that nothing will bring her back.

(See Christine's own letter to the professional standards and Conduct unit at Roselle. It covers what had happened to her since she started at Cowra).

Christine was born in France on the 20th March 1967; she migrated to Australia as a 15 year old with her family, so she had an absolute understanding of what it is like to be different.

She was a clever, shy, beautiful girl in both appearance and manner. She was very much a family person.

She took pride in her job and the service she worked for; she was very capable and well liked by many of her colleagues. She got on well with her patients; she also had a Diploma of Paramedical science, which she completed in 2003 and up until her death she was doing a Bachelor of Nursing, and was in her 3rd year and had only three subjects to complete.

She experienced problems with the other officers at Cowra right from when she started in 1999 (the first female appointed to Cowra in what was till then an all male station). Unfortunately she also had the same problem with her then Station Officer , who should have been an avenue for help, advice, and assistance. He did not fulfill his roll as officer in charge and instead actually wrote a letter of complaint to who was at that time the A/Sector Manager, stating that Christine caused his blood pressure to rise. In the complaint he also stated that the other ambulance staff were unhappy working with Christine and with women in general in the Ambulance Service. He also mentioned that money was being wasted on such things as the need for women's sanitary equipment.

Christine initially laughed off the harassment from her fellow officers, but it was relentless and when it continued over the years, it became very hard to bear. She often said "What is wrong with me? Why do they hate me so much?" There were so many incidents perpetrated against Christine, it is hard to remember which happened and when.

This harassment took the form of personal and professional criticism such as: constantly discrediting and rebuking her in front of patients. Fellow Officers picked her to trial a new ambulance uniform, which caused great jealousy and animosity towards her.

One incident in particular I recall her mentioning (in great distress) was regarding the choice of splint for a patient with a broken limb (2000-2001). She was given the wrong splint and when she asked for the correct splint, the Officer assisting refused to get it and stated to the patient "she doesn't know an arm from a leg". Christine stated she was so embarrassed and demoralized that she felt forced to put the wrong splint on and consequently was told by the Cowra

Hospital Casualty RN that she had used the wrong splint. She was later rebuked by other Cowra Ambulance Officers (the officer who had forced her to use the wrong splint didn't own up).

When thanked by clients whom she treated, her fellow officers would make personal insults in the patients presence such as "appearances are deceiving, you should see what is under the make-up" and "it's a shame that she needs so much time to put it on and that it makes her late in an emergency".

One Officer twice made a comment to another in front of Christine that even females (his wife in particular), thought Christine was more fake than Michael Jackson.

(2000-2001) She was involved in an incident at Eramble, a local Aboriginal Community. She was trying to defuse a particularly volatile situation with a sick patient that she and Station Officer _____ were attending. Her S/O rebuked her for wasting time being diplomatic with the patient and took over the situation. His intervention caused the situation to become violent and as a consequence he had to quickly retreat and lock himself in the ambulance and call for urgent police back up. Unfortunately he also locked Christine out and initially refused to let her in the vehicle being frightened for his personal safety. When she complained to her superiors their answer was "put up with it Christine, he is retiring" which he did.

She went off on leave during her pregnancy in late 2001 as the situation with her work colleagues had become unbearable. She returned to lighter duties at Cowra Community Health. She had put in an official complaint to the ambulance hierarchy re: the relentless harassment at that time. There was a meeting through the ambulance grievance process. She was told the parties involved would be told of the outcome. This didn't happen.

Following her return to work Christine said that her new Station Officer Phil Roxburgh was a very fair person and genuinely tried to sort out the problems at Cowra station, including her issues with the other ambulance officers. She said that the harassment, abuse, bullying and ostracism had initially been more underhand since her original complaint.

It didn't take long to really get out of hand and again took many forms including: officers ignoring her when she turned up as the 2nd person on a case scene, refusing to hand over case information to her, which is normal procedure.

She said that when treating a patient the other officers would stand in front of her and obstruct her treatment.

She had a problem with her neck and it was normal practice in the case of a heavy client that officers were supposed to call for backup to assist with the lift. When Christine was part of the team despite knowing she had a problem, the

assisting officer would not call for backup, as it was a "waste of ambulance money".

One such case occurred involving _____ and Christine involved a patient who weighed around 200 kgs. Christine said "call for assistance as this man is too heavy and we will hurt ourselves here". _____ refused and stated it's a waste of ambulance funds. He then told Christine that she was to take the head of the stretcher- the heaviest end, for the lift (what a gentleman). The ostracizing behavior just went on and on. She was ignored when she turned up for work.

It was her usual behavior to say hello to everyone when she arrived, one officer, _____, often attacked her in particular for not speaking even when she was witnessed saying hello by the then Station officer Phil Roxburgh.

She was constantly isolated. When the S/O was removed from the station the other staff refused to let her have a say in the work rosters. They gave 'on call' and 'overtime shifts' to Ambulance people from out of town, despite the fact that it cost the ambulance service more money as they had to pay the person who did the shift accommodation and living away allowance, rather than give them to Christine which was the regular cheaper practice.

When she worked an afternoon shift, she worked alone. The other officers complained about her endlessly, re: using the work computer for study (Diploma of Paramedical Science and then a Bachelor of Nursing). So she used her Laptop computer, which she then had to lock with a password as it was being tampered with.

The other officers then complained about where she studied. Firstly the TV room (it annoyed them when they were watching TV), then the office (misusing ambulance resources), and the meal room (it interrupted them when they needed to eat). She felt that she wasn't welcome to study in their vicinity at all. She was right.

They complained to the S/O about her studying at work (which is encouraged by the Ambulance Service when the other work is done). They just couldn't stand her using work time for study.

Her fellow officers approached Phil the S/O through _____ to have a study area set up separate from the station so they could study (the only person studying was Christine at that time). This area was isolated and had no heating or cooling facilities and was totally inappropriate. The request was refused.

She had real concerns with some of the other officers treatment of the patients and often said they (the patients) were not receiving the right treatment. Christine suggested to her fellow officers they should have case discussions to sort out this issue but this solution was refused.

She felt that the culture of bullying, judgmental behavior was also carried over by her fellow officers to the clients as well, and had voiced her concerns this issue on quite a number of occasions (see letter of complaint from Christine 20th February 2005).

Christine tried to keep the peace. She now tried not bringing her study materials to work and would just sit and watch TV when the work was done. Of course she always watched what they wanted to watch; she wasn't consulted. Her fellow officers said she wasn't a team player and didn't go to social events, she tried but gave up, Christine and Jason went to functions with other ambulance staff and their families and both said it was awful as they were both ignored.

She could not leave her vehicle at work because her tyres were let down. She was receiving phone calls at home that when she answered, the person on the other end would hang up. So she used the answering machine to screen her calls as she suspected that it was someone from the Cowra station.

There was a particular incident where someone had urinated all over her toilet at work and to such a degree it could not have been accidental.

Christine worked out who she felt was responsible and eventually after other disturbing extremely aggressive behavior towards her by this individual, went to her S.O. Phil Roxburgh to seek help; he suggested that he seek higher help from Assistant Operations Manager

He assured Christine that [redacted] had a duty under the service grievance policy to keep her grievance strictly confidential. Christine reluctantly agreed. She was frightened of a repeat of the retaliation she had previously experienced when she had gone to superiors for intervention. She was right to be distrustful of her superiors.

[redacted] leaked the incident. [redacted], the person who she suspected, was told of Christine's accusations and things at the station became explosive – [redacted] became very verbally abusive towards her and he told Christine, "See I told you. You have no chance seeking help from anyone above or the union as we will find out. Next time if you have an issue come to [redacted] or myself, don't go to Phil or any one else". (See memo confidentiality breach-09/02/05 to Gavan Ellis Operations manager).

This shows the harassment was also of considerable concern to the S.O. who was also on the receiving end and has left the station.

Christine's S.O. Phil Roxburgh went off on forced stress leave. In a very successful campaign, the other Cowra officers decided he was unsafe to work with because of supposed episodes of "fitting" described in a letter (see attached memo 25/10/2004). The other Cowra officers tried to get Christine to sign the

letter they had devised. She refused because she knew the allegations to be fabricated. So this letter went to the A.O.M.

Things became very ugly and Christine even said should anything happen to her we should look into it. This statement really demonstrated to me how very frightened she had become. We discussed what she would do. I said she should seek outside legal advice' but she wanted to leave it to the ambulance hierarchy despite what had transpired before. We talked about her going to the police as some of the behavior perpetrated against her was down right illegal and scary. Christine said she wouldn't be believed, as there were close connections between some of her colleagues and the local police. On one occasion had said to Christine that he had reported her to the police for drink driving (untrue). I felt she needed time out.

Christine went on stress leave for the second time in January 2005. This time she stated to her husband, my son Jason, and to myself, she was so demoralized and apprehensive about her treatment by her fellow officers that she wasn't able to go to work. Her stress leave was a work cover issue she was assigned a service rehab Officer

Even whilst on stress leave her situation from work intruded into her life. She told me of a situation about 3-4 weeks prior to her death where one of the officers from the station was following her around in the local Woolworth's store where he kept appearing in front of her as she went from aisle to aisle. We discussed what she could do about it. Her thoughts were 'she should do nothing as it would seem paranoid'.

I later received a phone call from my sister Debbie Fitzsimmons who had met up with Christine at Woolies on that instance and my sister voiced her concern over the fact that when they met, Christine was shaking and looked absolutely terrified.

Christine had asked Debbie could she pretend that they were shopping together as there was someone in the store from work following her and she didn't want to talk to the person alone or at all.

Debbie stated to Christine "Is a job really worth this much grief?". Christine mentioned to Debbie that she was off on stress leave and hoped it would be sorted out. They stayed until left the store before Christine and Debbie left.

This particular stalking incident was not followed up when Jason mentioned it in the enquiry done by the ambulance even though the person doing the interview with Jason and myself asked for my sister's contact details. They never contacted her. I think this most unusual as they particularly asked was there any outside

person that had witnessed any harassment of Christine by anyone from the local ambulance service and then failed to look into it further.

Christine was devastated by her treatment at Cowra. She stated that when she worked as a relief officer in other towns (Canowindra and Grenfell) she got on well with her fellow Officers but felt her fellow workers at Cowra hated her. She had previously worked in Sydney following her initial ambulance training and then moved with her husband (my son) Jason to Cootamundra in 1998. She loved her work and enjoyed working there. (She received a letter commending her on having a commendable sick leave record 21/10/1998)

At Cowra it was a different story and one so typical of one suffering work place harassment, bullying and intimidation. A sign of Christine's inability to cope with the situation is reflected in how much sick leave she required in Cowra (the maximum allowed).

Christine was again working for Cowra Health Service in Community Health for 2 weeks prior to her death on the 16th April 2005; after she was considered fit to return to work following stress leave. Because of her problems with the Cowra ambulance staff, she was actually working with me in my role as a Community Nurse. This placement was organized by her return to work co-coordinator through the NSW Ambulance. Christine was also seeing a Psychologist to help her work with her problem, as by now she was extremely depressed.

On Friday 15th April Christine and I had talked as she had been told that the person who was to be appointed to investigate the Cowra problem was of the same rank and from the same division as A.O.M. who had breached confidence. Christine felt that it was a hopeless situation and would result in a "white wash". It would have been career suicide for the chosen investigative officer to come to any other conclusion that the one she was expected to deliver.

Christine had also found out that her S/O (Phil) had been told that there were no suitable duties for him. He was told he could accept a posting elsewhere. Those on offer were not exactly an ideal location or he could return to Cowra Ambulance in his original position.

Christine was absolutely devastated, she didn't want to be forced to transfer to another station and spoke of a previous Cowra Station Officer who had previously moved away (stating the culture at Cowra Station was dreadful). found out that one of the local officers had rang the station where was appointed and told them how pathetic was. Christine said she could not return to work at Cowra with the ambulance. She said she felt so destroyed by these people that she couldn't even seek work as a nurse at Cowra Health Service because she would have to face the local ambulance staff daily.

In a memo dated 9th February 2005, Gavan Ellis The Ambulance Service Sector Manager reminded all staff of their obligation to ensure the workplace is free from all forms of harassment, bullying and intimidation. To quote Christine "Do they (the ambulance service) seriously think a piece of paper would sort out all these people who have become more empowered over the years". Christine and Phil are not the only ones who have been forced out of the job.

Christine received a letter from Louise Ashelford on the 3/3/05 following her own letter of complaint. Louise stated that the concerns would be reviewed.
(See both letter and memo enclosed)

We received no satisfactory resolution from the Ambulance, they felt it was a middle management problem and implied that Phil Roxburgh was part of the problem.

The local ambulance staff who have caused all this devastation are going about their daily lives going to work, and get to see their children grow up. Christine will not get that luxury, and her daughter, now 6 years old, is growing up without her mother. For the people who have caused this devastation, the whole chapter is finished. Unfortunately for us the life of a much-loved wonderful girl it is also finished, we will never see Christine again.

The NSW Ambulance told us that they would not appoint another female at Cowra for at least 6 months, so they acknowledge there was at least a female bias problem – as far as we are concerned 3 years too late. (See letter from professional standards 4th July 05). The State Superintendent and the head of the Professional Standards and Conduct Unit who came to let us know the findings of the enquiry said that none of the local ambulance people would be disciplined.

Why?

And that they would receive counseling to deal with Christine's death.

Why?

Who is counseling Jason and ?

So for my son Jason who is struggling to cope with losing his wife and raising his daughter, life is a struggle.

He has moved away to QLD where he doesn't have to see a NSW Ambulance vehicle coming towards him to remind him of what he has lost.

So we ask ourselves the question: what can your department do about this problem? Well Governments Govern, Government departments like others are accountable. Systems are in place so that when a problem arises in any area, it

is dealt with through the systems and processes and in a timely manner that protect the right of the individual and the employer.

If the real answer is "so long as we go through the systems and processes", without reaching any resolution and people die, then maybe the whole process is flawed.

Harassment, intimidation and bullying and its consequences are very well documented and there is supposed to be a Policy of "Zero Tolerance" towards it. We must all obey the rules. Those in higher management have to be accountable, especially when they are approached directly through the correct channels to resolve issues. Christine's situation should have been sorted out before it reached this terrible conclusion. Your department needs to ask some serious questions of the NSW Ambulance Service for instance; why they have allowed these types of behaviors to continue to the point where people from that one station are transferring away, going on stress leave and in Christine's case becoming so demoralized and depressed that she committed suicide.

It seems the service has a warped view of its Bullying and Harassment policy. Instead it seems to have a zero tolerance toward victims of this behavior and the victims are then subject to the same type of behavior from higher management. It's a very ugly unsafe department for its employers and will be until this culture changes.

We have moved on naively believing that the people at Cowra station would have learnt a lesson and change their ways but we have spoken with [redacted] who had replaced Christine, he was treated the same, it seems that nothing changes.

We have since been told about many bullying, intimidation and harassment problems faced by others in the ambulance. So no lessons have been learned.

I have enclosed other documents that demonstrate and support the problems that Christine faced. And I am happy to be contacted re this submission.

Yours Faithfully

Carolynn Hodder



**Ambulance Service
of New South Wales**

Professional Standards and Conduct Unit
PO Box 438
Rozelle NSW 2038

Direct Tel: (02) 9320 7784
Direct Fax: (02) 9320 7811

Officer Christine Hodder

Dear Officer Hodder

I refer to your correspondence dated 20 February 2005, concerning issues raised against several officers.

Your concerns will be reviewed and the Service will be in contact with you in the near future.

Should you wish to discuss the progress of your grievance, please contact me on 9320 7787.

Yours sincerely,

LOUISE ASHELFORD
Investigation and Policy Officer
Professional Standards and Conduct

3/3/05



**Ambulance Service
of New South Wales**

Professional Standards and Conduct Unit
PO Box 486
Rozelle NSW 2039

Direct Tel: (02) 9320 7787
Direct Fax: (02) 9320 7811
File Ref: C05/19

Mr Jason Hodder

Dear Mr Hodder

I refer to the grievance lodged by your late wife Christine to the Service's Professional Standards and Conduct Unit on 3 March 2005 concerning the conduct towards her by certain staff at Cowra Ambulance Station.

The Service has now completed its investigation into Christine's concerns.

As you aware, a briefing session with Mr Mike Willis, Acting General Manager, Operations and Ms Marian O'Connell, Manager, Professional Standards and Conduct Unit will be held on Tuesday 5 July 2005 in Cowra.

The investigation findings and recommendations arising from these are set out in the summary, a copy of which is attached.

I can advise that the recommendations have been accepted in principle and implementation of these are underway.

Recommendations that relate to individual staff members have not been included in the summary for reasons of confidentiality. I have however, provided a complete copy of the investigation report and recommendations to the NSW Police in confidence to assist their investigation on behalf of the Coroner.

I want to assure you that I will take all reasonable steps to eliminate the risk of similar incidents occurring in the future.

If you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Marian O'Connell on (02) 9320 7784 or Louise Ashelford, Professional Standards and Conduct Unit on (02) 9320 7787.

Thank you for your assistance during the Service's investigation.

Yours sincerely


Greg Rochford
Chief Executive Officer

cc Mr Denis Willis, Divisional Manager - Western

Investigation into Grievances - Christine HODDER / Phil ROXBURGH

On 13th April 2005 the Service instigated a fact - finding investigation into grievances raised by two staff members at the Cowra ambulance station. Following the untimely death of Christine HODDER, on 16th April 2005, wider terms of reference were given to the investigation and a team of three people appointed.

The report of the investigation has been received. It makes a number of findings and recommendations. Some recommendations relating to individual staff will not be canvassed here. No officer will be disciplined in relation to any matter which arises from this report.

The findings in brief are:

Christine HODDER made a grievance in 2001. This investigation found this earlier grievance was investigated and well managed at the time and action resulted. A number of staff referred to the 2001 grievance as "unresolved" including Christine HODDER. From her perspective there was a chronic problem in Cowra going back years and she believed she was experiencing harassment and bullying.

Bullying (comments or persistent behaviour that demean, humiliate or ridicule a person, usually covertly) and harassment (similar behaviour relating to irrelevant characteristics of the person, usually overt) are likely to create a hostile workplace but in the investigative environment conclusive findings about such behaviour may be difficult to make. Therefore this investigation could only make ~~only~~ limited findings and recommendations about Christine HODDER's grievances.

Nonetheless, the investigation noted some characteristics of the culture at Cowra Station which might have had a negative influence on the work environment and influenced the way Christine HODDER and Phil ROXBURGH felt about working at Cowra:

- a male dominated group who influence very strongly influence how the Station will be run,
- an expectation that new officers "will fit in"
- 'white-anting' of the first line manager
- regular challenges to station managers decisions
- acceptance of poor standards of cleanliness

The investigation found some first line managers lacked skills to effectively guide officers out of poor behaviour and to performance manage behaviour and support all staff (including Christine HODDER). There was evidence of some measure of conflict between Managers at a number of levels.

The review identified issues about the way the management of the workers compensation claims of Phil ROXBURGH and Christine HODDER these are addressed in the recommendations ~~to address~~.

The recommendations seek to address all issues in a practical systemic way, without creating an environment of individual blame or recrimination. The Service accepts the recommendations in principle. The recommendations and proposed actions are summarised ~~on~~ below.

Recommendations to address better management of harassment and bullying	Action proposed
That all workers compensation claims that involve any form of harassment be referred to the Services Equity and Diversity Co-ordinator and/or PSCU for advice and assessment.	Agreed. Action taken by HR and PSCU to create a system of referral.
The Service develop a training program for first line managers in people management.	Referred to HR for advice and action as appropriate in context of the current training calendar.
That training in performance and grievance management be given priority for rural and remote locations and updated every 3 years.	Referred to HR for advice and action as appropriate in context of the current program.
That management of staff conflict be part of the duty statement for all Station Officers, Assistant Operations Manager, Operations Manager and Divisional Manager.	Referred to HR for action.
That management of staff conflict and the enhancement of working relationships be considered as an essential element in formal performance management systems.	Referred to HR for action.
Recommendations regarding general attitude and behaviour of staff that have contributed to the poor staff climate at Cowra	Proposed action

Appoint-a senior experienced rescue trained officer to manage Cowra Station for approximately the next six months reporting directly to the Divisional Manager who should jointly develop a plan to address the station's administrative, personnel and managerial needs. With particular regard to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training all staff in OH&S, risk assessment and reporting processes and the Service's policies on harassment and bullying free workplaces, grievance resolution and management procedures. • Establishing regular staff meetings with proper records. • Ensuring regular direct involvement of the Operations Manager and the Assistant Operations Managers at Cowra Station for the next year. 	Agree but appointment to be limited to 3 months.
Provide a briefing on Cowra Ambulance Station to staff involved in this investigation.	Undertaken 5 July 2005. Further briefings by Divisional Manager may be given as needed.
That a separate briefing on this investigation be provided to Mr ROXBURGH and Mr HODDER.	Undertaken 4 and 5 July 2005
That the position of SO Cowra be advertised in the usual manner and filled. The proposed administrator should stay in place until several weeks after this person has taken up their new position.	Agreed. Timing to depend on available resources.
That the Service explore the most effective ways to change the behaviour of staff.	Requires further consideration.
Recommendations regarding the appointment of female staff	Proposed Action
An increased risk alert be activated when a female is to commence working at an all male station with liaison with the Equity & Diversity Coordinator occur.	Current procedures will be re-inforced as they accommodate such actions.
No female officer or Trainee Officers should be appointed to Cowra Ambulance Station for at least six months.	Agreed
A male officer be appointed to the position vacated by Christine HODDER.	Agreed
That all staff at any station which is about to receive its first female officer receive training in the Service's harassment, bullying and discrimination policies. That female officers be "buddied up" with another officer.	Current procedures will be re-enforced as they accommodate such actions, where appropriate and necessary.
Recommendations regarding the management of 'return to work and programs'	Proposed Action
The Service more aggressively manage workers compensation claims that involve stress or mental illness.	Referred to HR for action
Any such claims that extend beyond a month should be overseen by a management group.	Referred to HR for action
Geographical boundaries between divisions should not hinder resolution of such claims.	Under consideration.
Recommendations regarding other matters	Proposed action
That Divisional Management consider whether some capital works funds can be expended at Cowra station.	Facilities at Cowra have been refurbished quite recently, further works dependent on Divisional priorities.
That the Divisional Manager be tasked to instigate an independent inquiry into rostering and leave practices in the Central Western Sector.	To be referred to Divisional Manager for follow up
That a standard core roster be negotiated with the staff at Cowra to establish consistency for staff.	To be progressed as part of group 2/3 staff roll out and roster reviews.

A full copy of the report has been provided to the Police as part of their inquiries for the Coroner.

Please contact Marian O'Connell or Louise Ashelford at PSCU on 9320 77854 if you have any questions.



Memorandum

WESTERN DIVISION CENTRAL WEST SECTOR

Central West Sector
32 William Street
Bathurst NSW 2795

To: Christine Hodder

PO Box 340
Bathurst NSW 2795

Date: 9 February 2005

Direct Tel: (02) 6331 9233
Direct Fax: (02) 6331 8460

Subject: Staff Meeting

File Ref:

It has been brought to my attention that there has been comment and allegations made by officers against other officers at Cowra Station that are causing offence to these officers.

These comments can have a large impact on staff morale and in turn, adversely effects service delivery. Overall, this behaviour is damaging the work environment at Cowra Station and will not be further tolerated and may result in disciplinary action against the officers involved if it continues.

All staff are reminded of their obligation to ensure the workplace is free from all forms of harassment, bullying and intimidation.

Officers who have difficulties or a grievance are reminded to follow the Ambulance Service of NSW grievance and resolution procedures.

I have attached copies of the Harassment Free Workplace Policy and the Grievance Resolution Procedures for your information. All staff should read these document carefully as all future instances will be investigated and dealt with in accordance with Ambulance Service of NSW Policy.

Your compliance is required and this will help to ensure a harmonious work environment for all staff.


GAVAN ELLIS
*Operational Manager
Central West Sector*

Att: Grievance Resolution Procedures
: Harassment free Workplace Policy



**Ambulance Service
of New South Wales**

APPENDIX "C"

**Memorandum
Mid West Sector**

To: Operations Manager Gavan Ellis
From: Concerned Officers Cowra Station
Date: 25/10/2004

**WESTERN DIVISION
Ambulance Service of NSW
COWRA STATION
Cnr Shelley St
Cowra NSW 2794**

Phone: 6342 2252
Fax: 6342 3321

File Ref.

Dear Gavan,

We the undersigned (in alphabetical order) would like to bring to your attention our concerns for the health of Station Officer Phil Roxburgh. Since his appointment to Cowra Station, we have regularly witnessed Phil having what we can only describe as, cerebral type events.

The events seem to be involuntary and involve Phil extending his head up, holding his breath and being in a rigor state momentarily.

The events are happening at any given time or place, most alarmingly whilst Phil is driving. The occurrences are more frequent since Phil was admitted to hospital earlier this year for what he described as a cerebral event.

As Phils passengers, we are extremely concerned for our safety. We feel we are put at unreasonable risk with the described events. The possibility of Phil having a multi cycle episode whilst driving, alarms us.

We are extremely regretful for having to advise you of the situation.

Yours Sincerely

Officer
Officer
Officer
Officer

Officer
Officer
Officer

FRACO 271004
TO: SECTOR OFFICE
ON: 15 NOV. 1964 → SW

20 Feb 2005

I am writing this report regarding to what lead to my inability to return to work at Cowra Station. It must be added that this is only an overview on what I have endured at this posting. On the 20th of January 1997 I joined the NSW Ambulance Service after serving 5 years in the Army as a Medic. I was initially posted to Western Sydney as a Probationary Ambulance Officer, was then sent to Cootamundra Station as a Level 2 Officer (relief) in 1998 and finally posted to Cowra Station in 1999. I have found Cowra Station very difficult to work in from the very beginning of my posting as I felt that I was not accepted as a member of the team. It is my opinion that as the first and only female Ambulance Officer in this station I have never being accepted here due to my gender.

In 2001 I placed a complaint to Assisting Sector Manager about Cowra Station, as I was pregnant I was sent to Cowra District Hospital for light duty (high risk pregnancy) and to this day did not get an outcome from my grievance. Although I believe that the attitudes against me now became more covert due to the complaint.

I feel that in the past six years I have been badly treated as other staff members ^{COLLECTIVELY} bullied, belittled and intimidated me. In addition to this the staff in this station has constantly alienated and attacked my character and physical appearance since my arrival there, I felt constantly outnumbered as I believe that my co-workers were continuously collaborating to ostracize and insult me in order to be rid of me. I also believe that A/O was the main instigator of this in the past year.

Members of the staff were very critical of anything I did and focused on any event no matter how insignificant to use as gossip about me. I believe this was infectious amongst the staff and that if any one were to speak out or make any comments on my behalf they would in turn be also targeted.

When I fell pregnant in 2001 I took the opportunity to take 12 months leave without pay as I needed to be away from Cowra Station. As I was due to return to work I felt very apprehensive but due to financial commitments I did return in February 2003. Our new Station Officer Phil Roxburgh was very helpful and made the environment bearable as he attempted to change the culture which had set in Cowra Station, a couple of officers (specifically A/O) with the assistance of the S/O Roxburgh did appear to want to move on and build a working relationship, which I appreciated. But unfortunately S/O Roxburgh had stopped working at Cowra since October 2004 and the work environment again became so uncomfortable that on the 27th of January 2005 I finally could not tolerate it any longer, I rang Bathurst Sector Office stating that I could not return to work at Cowra Station as things were because of the negative effects it has had over my health and my family.

Working at Cowra Station has profoundly affected me not only physically and psychologically but also has had a big impact on the rest of my my personal life.

1999-2001

Station Officer _____ wrote a letter of complaint about me to sector office (Sector Manager Gavin Ellis) stating in general that I was causing his Blood pressure to rise and that the staff is not happy about me being at Cowra Station. I could not understand his complaint as it did not specify problems other than S/O _____ and the staff just weren't happy I was there.

S/O _____ on a number of occasions expressed his dismay in having females in the Ambulance Service once including that women are wasting the Service's money for example the sanitary requirements for the ladies.

A number of events occurred such as:

A/O _____ demanding I get out of the driver seat while going on an emergency job. I felt very belittled and intimidated.

I was totally ridiculed as A/O _____ laughed at me stating I had a hairy lip.

Again totally ridiculed and laughed at while A/O's _____ and myself were cleaning an Ambulance, as A/O _____ winked at the other two Officers and stated that my hair looked like one of the Aboriginal ladies at the mission. This is a comment he had already made the day before. I felt so hurt and embarrassed that I didn't know what to say.

While on another job with A/O _____ as I was treating a patient's broken leg, the patient turned to A/O _____ and said they were lucky to be working with pretty ladies now. The Officer responded by saying "Looks are deceiving".

A/O _____ had on many occasions was rude, talking down to me even while on a casualty job.

On an occasion involving three other officers in the staff room several remarks were made against females in the job. These remarks were discriminating against females in the Ambulance Service discrediting their ability.

The roster was often made to suit the pecking order especially when ASO were in charge. For example ASO _____ gave his friend PAO _____ a Sat and Sun overtime when I said I would also like the opportunity to do overtime shifts he bluntly refused.

I believe a lot of negative rumours have been spread about me for example:

S/O (Cowra Station 2000-2002) stated on a number of occasions that members of the staff were making nasty remarks about me.

S/O stated something along the same lines, one day saying that while watching the television with A/O that there was a show on French women and that A/O stated he hated F... French women!

S/O told me he was leaving Cowra as he didn't like working at this station adding that it was an unusually bad place to work at. He also stated that one of the Officers in Cowra had already sent a damning letter about him to his new station.

2003-present

Also throughout my posting at this station when ever we had three officers on the same shift I was assigned on my own.

Again ignored and alienated at the station and on jobs for instance I don't get hand overs when I arrive on scene. Whenever doing a lift or deciding on methods of lifting of route to Ambulance I m not acknowledge

Side remarks regarding academic people not being capable at putting theory to practice. I m the only Officer going through Uni for past 8 years.

Since the departure of S/O Roxburgh the roster has again been unfair for example there was an on call and overtime shift required normally the people on shift will be asked to do the on call as late as the day before. This on call however was given two weeks in advance to an Officer from Grenfell who was going to be doing the overtime shift. I approach the ASO stating that it didn't make sense to give it to an officer from another station as it would cost the service LAH plus motel when I am willing to do it. ASO stated it was already done, I added there's still two weeks to go just tell them they're not required. He replied that he'll speak to AOM. AOM (as per ASO) said "Oops won't do it again". Evening Shifts swapped to morning shifts all given to A/O. This occurred again with A/O to which I demanded fairness. PAO given On call while A/O's not asked.

A/O constantly told me that the staff did not want to work with me, I felt he was not saying it to help but to insult so I asked him to stop as I did not need to be told any more. He was very angry and made me feel very uncomfortable. I also found that this Officer constantly asked me if and when I had spoken with the Station Officer, on occasions adding that should speak to him not S/O if I had problems. I found this Officer to be very overbearing and have told him so as I felt as was being bullied.

Inservice was organized by S/O Roxburgh so that where possible we could go if we wished to. A/O agreed with it stating he was interested in going. When it came to attending A/O stated he was not going and warned me that they would be repercussions from the staff if I were to go, again I felt bullied and decided not to go.

While on a case I requested back up and A/O [redacted] arrived with A/O [redacted]. I was completely ignored by A/O [redacted] as he stood in front of me while I was talking to my patient I later spoke to the Officer asking why he was behaving that way and he again became angry stating 'You're not so perfect you know' to which I replied I never thought I was but I still don't deserve to be belittled. He then added again that everyone had a problem with me at the station. Again I said that this did not mean that he could treat me in this manner and that he didn't need to use other staff members' opinion of me in this discussion.

A/O [redacted] behaviour against me gradually worsened I often felt intimidated, ignored and excluded as a result of his behaviour. For example I walked into the station for an evening shift and I barely had a chance to say anything when he demanded why I didn't say hello.

Some members of the staff decided they didn't like their toilets anymore as it didn't have any fans and on at least three different occasions I found that the Ladies and Gents signs had been swapped I then changed back to their original places. I did not mind changing toilets but objected to not being asked.

I have then found the Ladies toilets in very dirty state which I believed to be deliberate as urine was spread all over the seat and floor (not just hit and miss). My main concern was mainly the motivation for such an act so I decided to speak to the station officer about it as I worried about where it may lead although I also was concerned about further attacks from staff members if dealt with wrongly. S/O Roxburgh asked me could he discuss this with AOM [redacted] I agreed. He then informed me that he wanted to see if there was a pattern I agreed although I felt there really was not much that could be done.

After returning from my holidays A/O [redacted] came into the station while on his holidays saying he needed to speak to me in the plantroom. He then proceeded to threaten to sue me saying that he was told by someone that he was accused of urinating all over the ladies toilet. I told him no one accused him and that my conversation with the station officer was in confidence. He said he didn't want people thinking he did this. I replied that I have not told anyone except the S/O he then asked me not to tell anyone I agreed telling him I had no intentions to. I later found out that he told everyone on station causing a big stir and once again I was victimised.

As I walk into the station in later 2004 I was handed a letter by A/O [redacted] to sign stating that the staff was concerned about the health of our station officer and their safety, I read the letter and said that I did not have such concerns and had I witness it I would have acted on it at the time it happened. I asked would the S/O be shown the letter before sending it A/O [redacted] said he will that afternoon as he would be back from holiday today.

The letter was not shown to S/O Roxburgh but there was a lot of conversation about the letter between A/O [redacted] and AOM [redacted], as he reported it to the rest of the staff. S/O Roxburgh was then removed from the station for test.

In January 2005 my husband came to visit me prior to starting his shift at 1330hrs once he left A/O [redacted] angry asked what was Jason's problem with him I told I didn't know what he meant and he stated that Jason didn't talk to him. I said Jason had said Hello. The Officer then stated that Jason couldn't come to the station if he wasn't going to speak to him. I replied that my husband was courteous to him and that he was visiting me not him. I then added that I did not appreciate his overbearing attitudes towards me. He then said that I was non verbally harassing him. I replied that I find it difficult to make conversation with a person that bullies me. He then stated that he believed we didn't get on because of S/O Roxburgh and did I know he (S/O) had said things about me?. I said I didn't want to know. He went on to say that he (S/O) should be out of the job and that did I know that he went to the union in the south division.

As we were driving back to station after a cas job PAO [redacted] seemed angry so I asked him if there was any problems and he said that if I wanted to know what was wrong with me that I should ask the rest of the staff, I replied that I did not ask what was wrong with me but if there was any problems regarding the case. He stated that 'she wasn't worth it' and I should have left it to the police to force her to hospital. I stated that it is important that we maintain a good rapport with our patients and be non judgmental. He then stated he didn't care and didn't want to talk with me anyway.

I have in many occasions, during my posting at Cowra, attempted to talk to individuals about their behaviours towards me in order to attain a workable relationship but none were receptive, while I truly love doing my job I find it increasingly difficult to go to work especially when certain Officers were on duty. The problems I have experienced in Cowra Station have been extreme and I believe they were beyond my powers to solve. My opinion is that Cowra Station resisted the posting of a female officer and therefore refused to accept me there.

A/O CM Hodder
Cowra Ambulance Station