

Submission
No. 32

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

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Partially Confidential

20th June 2008

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

To The Director,

Submission re: Ambulance Service of NSW 2008

Firstly I would like to introduce myself. I am a Paramedic
at Ambulance Station. I have been with the Ambulance
Service of NSW for over years and I have been in for
approximately years.

I am also a media liaison officer for the Ambulance Service and have always promoted the Ambulance Service in a positive light. I am also a member of the aboriginal community and have a strong interest in providing the best possible health care to the aboriginal community, free of discrimination.

In my first year of service as a Probationary Officer, I was witness to excessive bullying on Station. I was treated badly as a female officer and discriminated against from day one when the Station Manager introduced himself as and said "So you are the new Probationary Officer. I am the Station Manager . Don't ever let

me see you sitting around doing nothing. If there is something to clean then you clean it. If a car comes in and needs refuelling then you get up and refuel it. Understand?' This was totally different to the introduction a male Probationary Officer received by the same Station Manager.

I witnessed verbal abuse of Officers by the Station Managers, threats and swearing at staff for trivial things such as lying in a position greater than 45 degrees before 1700hrs: I was sworn at by my Training Officer and got to a point that I hated going to work. I did put in a verbal complaint to a District Officer who said that they needed it in writing. I was too afraid to put complaints in writing as I believe that I would become a victim of even more vicious attacks.

The Station Manager on Station is also the

. This manager is a very powerful person and head of the so called 'boys club'. If you are in the boys club you will be looked after very well and if you are not, you are treated like an outcaste. As a Probationary Officer I was neither an outcaste or in the club as I was only there for a nine to ten month stint. Things were made very clear though, if I wanted help in any area I needed to be in the Union. For example, when I was awaiting my posting. I have a family of three children and lived in the area. I did not want to be posted to Sydney but in reality would go to where ever I was sent. I asked my Station Manager (who is also the) if he knew where I was to be posted yet and would he help me to stay in the country area. asked me if I was in the Union because if I was not he would not help me. As my Station Manager I did not think that he had the power to question my Union membership and it should not have any influence as to whether or not he would pass on information that he should naturally pass on as Station Manager. This was to be the beginning of my introduction to how powerful the boys club is.

For those that were in the boys club they would get preferential treatment. If they were training they would be put with the highest clinical level officers so that they were getting the best experience and the best training. Again being in the boys club gave you a better position on the roster which could in fact mean a higher income as you would more likely be called out for off duty jobs. You would also get less relief, which means you would not be sent away to another station to do relief if you did not want to. However if you are not in the boys club you would get sent away more often than others.

One officer, not in the boys club, was sent away constantly even when his wife was expecting a baby.

There was another officer who was posted to Station. This officer had a 'run in' with and was definitely not in the boys club due to the fact that he stood up to . Even though this officer was meant to be working on Station he was not welcome on that station and he was sent to do relief all over the area. He was in fact given an administration car so that he would be able to leave from home and would not have to go to Station for anything. I am not sure how he got his mail; it is possible that his mail was forwarded onto the stations that he was doing relief at. I do not understand how management did not manage this situation but in fact supported bias against this officer. It also showed to all in the area that is a very powerful man and what he wants, he gets. Management are powerless to stand against this man, this was clearly demonstrated by management's inaction and willingness to let this Officer be bullied and alienated.

I was working on Station when Union elections came up. I was asked by if I would add my name to a list that is being faxed around to all stations. This list was a list of support for to remain as President. I said that I would like to keep my opinions private and that I did not wish to put my name on this list. It was then that I was threatened by with "You will never make paramedic if you do not put your name on the list and you will never be able to step foot on Station again" I then agreed to have my name put on the list. I did tell management about the threats at the time but nothing was done until later when I took to court.

My name was now mud in the boys club. So even though my name went on the list I was now an outcaste, even though I was on a different station. As the elections went on, the Station Manager on Wellington Station, , received a phone call asking why all the officers on had not voted yet. If we did not put in our votes we would be known as the scab Station. Station Manager asked if I had voted to which I replied yes and it was in the mail. did say that he knew who had voted and that my voted had not been received yet. How uncomfortable that made me as I had not voted for and by the sound of things he had someone in the Electoral office letting him know who voted so how easy would it be to tell him also who had voted for him. I was

terrified as I know many others would have been. How is that for confidential voting?

When an officer that was working on _____ was requesting a compassionate transfer to Sydney to be near his ailing mother his application was rejected. He then went to _____, to request his assistance in the matter. I was there when he made that phone call and _____ said that he was unable to help this officer because the officer had become friends with the Station Manager _____. This officer has since committed suicide and I was a Pallbearer at his funeral.

I was aware of a _____ Officer requesting for light duties while she was on maternity leave. Due to the fact that this officer was not on the good side of _____ she did not get light duties. I am aware of _____ saying that he would make sure that there would be nothing available when the time came for her to apply and now don't you tell me that management can not manipulate systems to punish people or to make a statement. It is for reasons such as this that officers do not stand up as it will ruin their career.

The MOL's (Maintenance of Line) had come into play while I was an OH&S officer in _____. MOL's were a big money spinner for Station. I understand that the Union (Sub branch) and management had come to some sort of arrangement where they agreed to increase the required staff levels. This agreement was that _____ Station would increase its level of shifts to two day shifts and two afternoon shifts. It used to be two days and one afternoon. We did not have the staff to cover those shifts, thus overtime was created at _____ Station. This also happened to a few other stations around _____. These stations could not cover their shifts thus a huge amount of overtime was created. _____ officers were rolling in the extra cash because they had an ideal roster on _____ with five days on and four days off. Thus on those four days off they could put in for overtime at any of the four or more outlying stations that were not able to cover their new rosters. Fatigue then became an issue with records showing officers having worked in excess of 70 days straight without a day off. They were also covering on-call for some of those days. This was creating a huge fatigue issue but the money was outstanding to those who wanted to push themselves to the limit.

It was reported to ICAC and investigated. However if management agreed with the Union to the increase of staffing levels then there is little ICAC can do. Even though I believe that the managers were influenced by the Union. In my fight against fatigue I again became a target for those members of the Union and the boys club at . Vicious rumours, name calling and bullying were some of the ramifications I received. I was further bullied by some staff on Station as those officers had to keep in good with the boys club and I believe they were encouraged to bully me. The Station Manager at tried to take action against the bullying and supported me in my mission to prevent fatigue. In doing so he came under attack from the too. I witnessed threats towards Station Manager from . He threatened to see Mr out of the job and stated to him that he would ruin his career. In saying that, he encouraged staff to put in complaints and to make Station Manager life difficult. Officers have stated that wrote the complaint and made them put it in. I was witness to two officers discussing ways to ruin career. and were sitting around the staff room table discussing complaints that they were going to put in. At this stage neither officer had put in a complaint about him before. stated to me "We have got this time" I knew what they meant and that they were going to lodge a complaint. They did and Station Manager was stood down from his position. is a very strong member of the boys club. complaint went in via IIMS (Incident Information Management System) and was acted on. When ever I have put in a complaint about a person bullying via IIMS I have not had a reply; in fact they are deleted off the system without consultation or advice on how to lodge a complaint.

I have been verbally abused, hit in the head by cupboard doors, keys thrown so hard at my face that I have cut my hand in an attempt to protect my face, sworn at and discriminated against. I have put in complaints with my Station Manager who then went to Sector Office with those complaints, but nothing was done. I have approached our Assistant Divisional Manager about being called names by when new staff come to and have never met me before, such as a F-----, but Assistant Divisional Manager did nothing about it.

At one stage my District Officer stated to my Station Manager that complaints from Station, such as those that has put in, I put in the bin as there is nothing that

can be done about them.
against the Union or

will not act on them if they are
because if he does he is overridden by
who is supporting

. So those complaints of bullying that I put in were filed in the bin.

Please explain to me ZERO tolerance to Bullying and please explain to my how the Ambulance Service of NSW enforces the rule of ZERO tolerance. I believe that there is ZERO tolerance to those that complain about bullying and that I have made a noise about being bullied and they want to shut me up. I have been ignored by management and I have been bullied by members of the Union who management are too afraid to stand up against. I have been a victim and have attempted to take my life as a way to escape the horrors of bullying. Management is aware of my suicide attempt. But still to this day they will not act against bullying even though it is witnessed, documented, reported by more than one person, verbally reported, reported in writing and a formal complaint processed.

My complaint that I sent to PSCU on the is attached. I did not receive notification of receipt of my complaint until six weeks later, when , the , rang PSCU to question where my complaint was and why I had not had a reply of any sort. PSCU passed on my complaint/grievance to but no investigation was initiated. I was informed that there need not be an investigation and that mediation would suffice. I have more evidence and more documentation than those that were put in against Station Manager . I have witnessed accounts of abuse, discrimination and harassment that have been going on over the past 12 months but this did not prove to be evidence enough to create cause for an investigation. I believe it is because I am a female and that females do not get the same response as males do when it comes to putting in a formal complaint. I am a woman and a victim because of my gender; no one has been stood down. No one has been disciplined. No one has had reprimand. No one but myself, who because I put in a complaint was then bullied by management. I was humiliated in front of those that bullied me on Station. I was harassed by management, the management that were meant to be there to support and protect me from bullying.

No wonder we have the suicide rate that we do in the Ambulance Service of NSW. Do not think for a moment that most of the Ambulance Officers commit suicide because of what they see on the road. Do not except the

excuse that they had mental health issues (we all do at sometime) and do not think that it is unavoidable. Many of the suicides are because of the bullying and harassment, or management that will not support their staff. It is lack of communication and lack of concern for welfare. It is because management does not take into account that when an officer calls out for help it is usually the last straw. Like a drowning man they do not call out until they are about to go under and have given up the fight. It is then that management pull the support ropes in.

I have stated many a time that a dead Ambulance Officer is much easier to manage than a complaining officer. This is shouted down by PSCU, Management and Rick Management but they do not see what we see. The isolation, alienation and total segregation of staff when they are in trouble is unbelievable.

I was on the phone for nearly five hours talking a fellow officer out of shooting himself. This officer was being suspended for disciplinary reasons. He was then assigned to another station to work while the investigation was going on. He was asked not to talk about his situation. He was taken away from his wife and family, sent to another town when he was put up in a motel where he would remain in between shifts, alone, isolated and left to contemplate life and death. He had convinced himself that his family would be better off if he were dead. He had a method and means. He felt could not go to his direct manager nor could he go to his Assistant Divisional Manager for help. I had the chance to talk him out of it and to get staff from Risk Management to talk to him. They did talk to him once. Since then I have been monitoring his welfare and keep in contact with him to make sure all is well. I have given him the names of councillors and psychologists but management has not. Management has not even kept him informed of his progress.

There is so much that I would like to say but I feel like I am going to be crucified for what I have put down as it is. I have attached two documents that are being acted on at this time. One is with the Anti Discrimination Board at the moment and the other is a copy of the complaint that I sent to PSCU.

I pray that action is taken to prevent bullying within the Ambulance Service. I pray that discrimination will become a thing of the past but I can not see that happening in my life time.

I also hope that this enquiry is not going to just except that the Ambulance Service is starting to do something now by having special Healthy Workplace seminars and additional training. There needs to be action against the bullying, against those Union members that are more powerful than management and dictate to management. Managers need to be accountable for their complacency and lack of action. Remember this is a ZERO tolerance work place, so enforce it.

Asking for your help

Paramedic/victim