



20 November 2008

Community recognition for NSW Ambulance Service

NSW Minister for Health, John Della Bosca today launched a community campaign to tackle the number of assaults and threatened violence against Ambulance paramedics.

Mr Della Bosca launched the campaign as part of the first annual 'Thank a Paramedic Day' and said hard working paramedics deserve the community's respect.

"Thank a Paramedic Day is an opportunity for the community to recognise the valuable role of our Ambulance Officers who are on the frontline saving lives and helping people," Mr Della Bosca said.

"As I move around the State talking to paramedics the one thing that comes through loud and clear is that paramedics join Ambulance to serve the community and make a difference.

"During 2007/08 there were over one million ambulance responses to emergency and non-emergency incidents.

"The overwhelming majority of these one million patients are very appreciative and respectful of our ambulance officers, however there are some cases of unfounded aggression from patients, their families or the general community," he said.

- In 2005/06 paramedics reported 216 incidents of aggression;
- In 2006/07 paramedics reported 234 incidents of aggression; and
- In 2007/08 paramedics reported 238 incidents of aggression.

This does not include verbal abuse or abuse that does not result in injury.

Mr Della Bosca said the NSW Government was sending the message to the community with a grassroots campaign and posters which will be distributed throughout NSW.

Posters will be distributed to all GP clinics and hospitals in NSW with a second phase roll out of posters and coasters to be distributed to pubs and clubs.

"There is no excuse for abuse against paramedics who are providing life saving treatment to a member of the community," Mr Della Bosca said.

"In some cases patients who are sick, or may be anxious about their health or the health of their loved ones, or who are affected by alcohol and drugs can be threatening and out-of-character.

"Stress and a sense of powerlessness can lead to frustration, and in some cases patients and families have reacted with violence and abuse against staff.

"The message is simple - violence and verbal abuse towards paramedics will not be tolerated," he added.

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Examples of aggressive behaviour include:

- An Ambulance paramedic was treating a patient at the scene of an accident. The owner of a vehicle temporarily blocked by the Ambulance, called on the paramedic to move the Ambulance - when she explained she was treating a patient and would move the Ambulance as soon as possible, the owner of the car attempted to drive the car at the paramedic and patient in a threatening manner.
- An ambulance was driving in a school zone at 40km when the impatient driver in the car behind sped past and side swiped the Ambulance ripping the side mirror from the vehicle. When the Ambulance officer approached the driver he was abusive.

Mr Della Bosca said the NSW Ambulance Service has developed procedures for paramedics to follow on the occasions where they are in danger and the NSW Police Force is prompt to respond.

“In the most serious cases, Ambulance crews are advised to “stand off” and await the arrival of Police before approaching or entering the address, but they will always attend the scene,” the Minister said.

“We provide our paramedics with the training to diffuse serious incidents and strategies to minimise risk.

“Every incident of violence or aggression is reported to police and the NSW Government will pursue individuals with the full force of the law who cause harm to our hardworking front line paramedics,” he added.

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