



23 November 2008

It's an ambulance - not a taxi

NSW Minister for Health, John Della Bosca, has announced a new campaign will be rolled out later this week to better inform the community about the proper use of ambulances.

Mr Della Bosca said paramedics were frustrated by the increasing number of people attempting to use ambulances as a taxi service for the treatment of minor ailments.

"This type of behaviour prevents paramedics from attending life threatening emergencies and puts lives at risk," the Minister said.

"During 2006/07, Ambulance NSW responded to 22,000 incidents where patients refused any form of treatment.

"Ambulance paramedics are highly trained health professionals who spend up to three years qualifying to provide out of hospital medical care to members of the community.

"A significant number of triple zero calls requesting an ambulance response were not an emergency and did not require medical assistance.

"The *Don't use an ambulance as a taxi* campaign will include two different radio commercials featuring re-enactments of inappropriate calls that will be distributed to FM and AM radio stations in metropolitan and regional areas.

"Posters will also be appearing in the offices of local GPs to reinforce the message," Mr Della Bosca said.

Real-life examples of inappropriate calls to the Ambulance Service of NSW include:

- A person asking paramedics to retrieve a pillow that fell off the bed as he was too tired to retrieve it.
- Person claiming she had cut her foot. In fact, she had a piece of beetroot in her slipper.
- Person requesting their bed be adjusted.
- Person testing their medical alert alarm. When ambulance arrived stated: "Now I know it works."
- Call from a shopping centre, person requesting: "I live near the hospital could you give me a lift home?"
- A person complaining they could not sleep.
- A person seeking treatment for a broken fingernail.

"Ambulance paramedics are there to provide an emergency service for people needing urgent medical attention for such conditions as shortness of breath, unconsciousness, chest pain, broken bone(s), traumatic accident, head injury, suspected heart attack or stroke and excessive blood loss," the Minister said.

.../2

“Also, there has been a common misconception in the community that you can ‘jump the queue’ of a busy emergency department if you arrive by ambulance rather than using personal or public transport,” Mr Della Bosca said.

“This is simply not true. Patients are treated at hospital according to the urgency of their medical need - regardless of how they made their way there.

“Interestingly, metropolitan-based residents are more likely to phone ambulances rather than their rural residents.

“We don't want to deter anyone with a genuine emergency from calling for an ambulance but we are not providing a free taxi service.

“Committing ambulances to calls where they are not required puts lives of other patients at risk - it's that simple.

“Despite a significant problem with the inappropriate use of ambulances, NSW still managed to record the best Emergency Department performance in the nation in terms of patients being seen within recommended benchmarks, according to the AMA Public Hospital Report Card 2008,” the Minister added.