

SUBMISSION BY AMBULANCE EMPLOYEES AUSTRALIA -VICTORIA (AEAV) - A  
SECTION OF UNITED VOICE  
PROFESSIONAL REGISTRATION OF PARAMEDICS

BACKGROUND

AEAV represents 2600 members in the State of Victoria of which 2500 have paramedic qualifications.

The union's preferred option is the Registration of Paramedics through a National Registration Scheme. (Option 4)

Our organization prefers this option to any of the others detailed in the "*Options for Regulation of Paramedics*" Consultation Paper July 2012.

Our reasons for supporting Option 4 are as follows:

1. It will establish a minimum national educational qualification for entry into the profession of Paramedic. The current established / emerging standard is a 3 year Bachelor Degree. This ensures that all patients will receive a consistent and uniform level of clinical care.
2. There does not appear to be any barriers to creating a national accreditation scheme for the education and training of paramedics. All emergency ambulance services operate under the auspices of State regulation and State statutory provisions whether the State Government is the direct employer or provides funding for other statutory bodies or organisations to operate the service. These services operate on a not for profit basis in the emergency sector and therefore the only financial restraint would be State Government budget limitations.
3. Clinical practice in ambulance has made significant advances in the past 20 years and paramedics are now treating patients with drugs and equipment which pose risks to patients as well as being life saving. A national registration system can provide a framework within which an individual's competency to practice in an increasingly complex and demanding health environment can, when required, be objectively assessed. The Consultation paper details those clinical risks and benefits to patients. We agree with those.
4. Where the competency, behaviour or attitude of paramedics brings into question the safety and well being of patients or their clinical treatment it is essential that an investigation be conducted in a consistent and objective manner. The ability of an external agency to do this ensures fairness for employees and that complaints from patients, the public or other organizations are being treated with respect and openness.

5. The capacity for Appeal regarding the loss or suspension of registration under the Option 4 is fair to employees and provides a framework which is both objective and consistent for all paramedics nationally. The emphasis on rehabilitation/retraining also ensures that loss of livelihood is very much a last resort.
6. The union has been very concerned about inconsistent treatment of paramedics who have become addicted to medications which they use in the course of their work. It has been our experience that employers focus in these circumstances is primarily one of punishment and discipline rather than on rehabilitation, supervision, support and retraining. These situations have produced highly inconsistent outcomes with a substantial number of employees being immediately terminated while others with personal relationships with their superiors are given a second chance.
7. Under Option 4 it is anticipated that investigations will proceed in a timely manner which frequently does not occur when they are being conducted in an industrial context.
8. There are a number of examples in which the immediate termination ended an employee's ability to continue to practice as an emergency paramedic as there is only one employer in the State. This is the same in all States and Territories which underlines the seriousness of this issue.
9. In Victoria we are aware of 5 cases of paramedics having self administered drugs taken from the employer in the course of their employment.
  - The addiction in these cases stemmed from stress related illness deriving from the trauma of their work which had often led to family breakdown and exacerbation of the addiction. Three were terminated even while not being convicted of an offence before the Courts. The other two were not terminated and were given an opportunity to rehabilitate themselves and remain in the job. The union is not aware of why such inconsistent treatment would have applied. The other consideration is that the employer does not regard the medical condition of the employee as having any primacy in these situations.
  - A recent case involved an employee who was charged with a sexual offence after a complaint from a drug affected patient. The employee was terminated before the matter went to court. Despite an acquittal by a jury in the County Court, the employee was not reinstated and the matter was further dealt with through the industrial tribunal. Again it

was determined that the employer had no grounds to terminate him but the employer refused to reinstate. He left the industry after accepting a substantial financial payout. This employee was also a registered nurse who self reported his situation to the then State Nurses Board prior to the County Court Trial. His registration was suspended subject to the outcome of the case and was immediately reinstated after his acquittal. The inconsistency in this case between two professions and the manner in which they are regulated, is stark. The employee has returned to nursing.

10. Due to the increasingly complex treatments which paramedics are authorized to perform there is a belief in the community that the clinical expertise of these employees would be under careful scrutiny. Members of the public expect professionals to be subject to peer review and for minimum standards to be met. If there is a failure, the public expect that they can raise their concerns within a known formal process and that they will be treated with respect. In this respect the community would regard paramedics in the same light as doctors and nurses who they know to be registered. The public have a right to expect that they will receive a uniform level of care and treatment no matter which State or Territory the person is in when an ambulance is needed. At present there is no such consistency due to the plethora of locally dictated scopes of practice. This also impacts on the ability of paramedics to practice in all States and Territories and restricts their mobility. Portability of qualifications is essential particularly when there are so few possible employers of emergency paramedics.
11. In Victoria where the non emergency sector is privatised and being conducted as individual businesses, protection of the title is very important. Some private companies have incorporated the title "Paramedic" into the name of their business even though they do not employ paramedics or paramedics with the qualifications and clinical practice required in an emergency ambulance service.

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