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SERVICE and Care

NSW Ambulance is shifting its services and caring for a wider diversity of patients as it evolves to meet the state's needs.

Images courtesy of NSW Ambulance

As the population ages across New South Wales, emergency services are adapting to care for these shifting demographics. NSW Ambulance is engaging with its staff, reinforcing a patient-first mentality and ensuring the safety of all stakeholders.

The CEO Magazine met with Commissioner Ray Creen, Chief Executive, to discuss the NSW Ambulance journey.

***The CEO Magazine:* With a wealth of experience in the ambulance services of the UK and Australia, both on the frontline as a paramedic and in management roles, what do you think makes a great leader? How do you make decisions under pressure?**

Ray: The ideal organisational leader would be one whose value-based leadership aligns with this vision of excellence in care. A great leader in the ambulance services is someone who is patient-centred and staff-focused. A large proportion of my decisions are made based on the question 'What's best for the patient and the

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- Ray Creen

service delivery that they require?"—while also focusing on our people and what they need to be able to deliver a service to the patient safely and effectively.

How do I make decisions under pressure? Well, the first thing that comes to mind is a quote by Noel Hedington: "Experience is what you get the day after you need it." I think making decisions under pressure becomes relatively easy if you are prepared to use both the situational facts and information as well as your experience. Decisions in the emergency situation are aided by a good, robust planning and preparation framework. You have to continually train and put yourself and your team through all possible scenarios so that you're well rehearsed in whatever potential incident you're going to deal with, because in these situations you only have one opportunity to make the right decision.

In such a vital area, how do you ensure that you attract and retain the right talent and engage your paramedics?

The many individuals that make up an organisation have an important part to play in the overall dynamics

and behaviour of the organisation. Therefore, it is imperative that the right people are recruited into the right roles, displaying the appropriate behaviours and values to influence the whole.

I am of the firm belief that one of the first roles of a leader is to recruit and build a team, so I'm very keen to be involved in defining the structure, management, and leadership competencies and what that leadership framework looks like. Then, ensuring that we recruit to that competency framework and essentially making sure that the people that we recruit, particularly in senior areas, embody not only the competencies needed to be an emergency services leader, but also a leader of people aligned with the values of the organisation.

I think engaging with paramedics and all staff is very important. I believe it's essential to be out there engaging with all employees on the front line, managing and leading by walking around. I am still a paramedic at heart, so I try to maintain actual hands-on patient care as well. I'm a very visible presence and a strong champion of the needs of our front-line paramedics. >



What are the values that your paramedics should live and work by?

We always put the patient first. Ensuring we deliver the 'excellence in care' needed to enable a good patient outcome is very important to us. However, the safety of our paramedics and staff is paramount. One of the principles that I have a particular focus on is 'safety first' in all circumstances.

We have our CORE values, which are Collaboration, Openness, Respect, and Empowerment. We try to instil these in everyone, and we expect our staff to behave and demonstrate them in their collaborations with other employees, partner agencies, patients, and families.

Mutual respect throughout NSW Ambulance is crucial to our success and good patient care. We all have a job to do as part of a team. There are a lot of people responsible for making sure the paramedic can get to a patient quickly and deliver appropriate care. The whole organisation needs to be, and is, aware that everyone has an equal part to play in delivering good care to our patients.

You mentioned that there's been a 50-per-cent increase in assaults on paramedics. How do you train your paramedics to deal with these situations, and what's your long-term plan to deal with this issue?

We have recently launched a public awareness campaign 'If you hurt a paramedic' to try and persuade people that paramedics are not just a uniform; they are human beings who have families to go home to—they're someone's mother, father, sister, brother, son, or daughter. You're not assaulting a paramedic; you're assaulting a family member who is really just trying to do their job.

A training program is in place for new and current paramedics to assist them in dealing with potentially volatile situations and to equip them with the skills to

avoid being assaulted. The program places a heavy emphasis on staff safety; as I said before, while the patient is very important to us, staff safety is paramount. The program reiterates the importance of scene safety, knowing how to de-escalate aggression, using escape techniques. And finally, if a paramedic finds themselves in a particularly aggressive situation, then we encourage them to walk away and leave the scene.

You have strong relationships with many of your partners. How have you nurtured those partnerships?

All our partners and our relationships with them are important to us. They are invariably an important link in the chain of our service delivery and also have a fundamental part to play in the efficiency and effectiveness of the care we provide. We nurture them all in the same way by following our CORE values and by having regular meetings and updates; and, as a public service, we have quite stringent contract performance-monitoring processes.

How are you developing NSW Ambulance for the future?

One of the biggest challenges for us is that the triple zero demand for our services continues to rise, and the type and age of the patients we're dealing with is changing. As one of the largest and busiest services in the world, we respond an ambulance on average 3,376 times per day, and in 2013 we provided care to more than 862,000 patients.

The type of service we have to deliver in the future needs to be very flexible and be able to change with the demographic of our patients, but also innovative in how we deliver care and respond to both the patients whose conditions are time-critical and those who are experiencing a more low-acuity health issue. Our move towards more of a mobile health service will see us appropriately treat and discharge people at the scene, or



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treat and refer them to their general practitioners or other suitable care pathways.

Analysis of last year's demand demonstrated that only 10 per cent of the triple zero calls we receive are people who are seriously ill or injured and in need of a time-critical intervention. For critical patients, we need to have a service delivery model that makes sure we get advanced care and paramedics to them rapidly and that they are treated and admitted to an emergency department. In order to do that, we need to make sure that we're not tying up ambulances and paramedic resources with lower-acuity patients.

Around 50 per cent of the patients we treat do not have a life-threatening condition, so we believe we can manage them differently in the future by sending appropriate resources to them, treating them on scene, or referring them to a more appropriate care pathway and helping to save the ambulances and emergency departments for the serious emergencies. •

"The leadership and staff at NSW Ambulance have an intense commitment to providing the best care and performance in critical missions. We share that passion. With that in common, NSW Ambulance has welcomed Aerosafe as a trusted partner in their enterprise." - Kimberley Turner, CEO, Aerosafe

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