

WACHS ambulance strategy

Moving forward to provide a sustainable Ambulance service within the country setting consistent staffing levels need to be one of the prime objectives.

Historically this has been an area of poor investment.

Full Volunteer centres are in essence a local community ambulance service, operating under the clinical direction and work practices of St John Ambulance Western Australia (SJA). They are fully funded by the community, and more to the point, fully staffed by local community members. As volunteers these community members become trained as clinicians, raise funds to purchase vehicles and buildings, run the service, and more importantly, recruit from their local community to sustain staffing levels. Often this becomes their Achilles heel in trying to meet the local service demands, including distance transfers. For Career / Volunteer mix depots priorities are different with workload demand and demand for volunteer shift cover extremely high, however this is within communities of relatively fixed populations and acutely differing demographics.

St John Ambulance (SJA) use two different models utilizing Paramedics for country support.

Community Paramedics (CP) are fully trained SJA paramedics deployed to smaller regional communities to offer support in recruitment, training and retention. These paramedics are not on-road clinical officers on a day-by-day basis, concentrating on the human need of their local depot. While these officers will attend cases as paramedic backup support, depending on need and severity, SJA openly discourages regular CP shift cover. The CP, without the daily demands of roster cover, is free to canvas, recruit, educate etc, thus utilizing their time to build a stronger more healthy depot.

The hybrid Paramedic / Volunteer model is usually deployed into larger towns where caseload demand is too high to sustain a service supported with the CP model. Usually there are a number of paramedics at the depot based on community demand for the service over the 24 hour period and downtime / availability to respond.

The greater the demand, the more career paramedics deployed to the location. The paramedics at these hybrid depots are required to fulfill the role of the CP, as well as the full clinical load before them. (This point in particular has been ignored previously). Recruitment, training, retention, rostering and daily depot management are all additional requirements of the Paramedic at a hybrid depot, in particular the Station Manager.

It would seem the larger the community the more difficult engagement of community becomes. Competing community opportunities and needs indeed hamper the recruitment process. Many people, who become volunteers in the bigger towns, do not stay with the service, as the communities have a lot to offer and their own community involvements tend to soon take precedence and draw them away.

The Volunteer workforce is the lifeblood of the country model and it is in this recruitment arena I believe SJA could, and should make significant investment if the model is to be sustainable, or even continue at all.

Through regionalization SJA have divided the state into sectors. All sectors have both Hybrid and full volunteer depots.

It is my suggestion that investment should be undertaken to introduce full time "Recruitment teams" into each sector. I believe the teams mandate and KPI's should revolve around sustaining a healthy volunteer workforce within their respective sectors. These people should be employed as specialists, with specific skill sets, in the human relations, specific to volunteer recruitment.

I believe they should be "hands on people", not sitting behind a desk, but out in the community canvassing, promoting and recruiting. There is definitely enough need for a team in each sector to remain engaged year round in the process of maintaining healthy staffing levels in depots without CP coverage.

There has been counter argument that recruitment is better done with local people. This is true to a degree, however Paramedic staff in high case load depots do not get the time to plan, organize and deliver such recruitment drives. Where possible a local person could accompany or become an auxiliary during the recruitment drive of the Recruitment team.