



MEDIA STATEMENT

Hon. Adele Farina MLC
Member for South West Region

9 March 2016

Chief Psychiatrist's report falls short

The Chief Psychiatrist's report into the suicide deaths of five St John Ambulance paramedics and volunteers offers little comfort to paramedics, volunteers and their families, South West MLC Adele Farina said today.

"The report is critically undermined by a significant inconsistency, questionable processes and an obvious lack of any investigative analysis", Ms Farina said.

"The foreword of the report states that uptake of St John Ambulance funded external counselling service by the five people was minimal and this is supported by a statement at page 16 that only one person accessed the St John Ambulance funded counselling service, yet at page 14 the report states that a majority of the five people accessed St John Ambulance funded external counselling service, these statements cannot all be correct and the inconsistency calls into question the reliability of the report.

"The report finds individual factors, such as mental health problems, family conflict and relationship difficulties, as the major contributing factor in their deaths but fails to investigate and assess whether these were the product of working conditions and systemic and structural problems within the organisation.

"Multiple reports from other domains are quoted as evidence that a perceived lack of support and cultural issues exist in all ambulance services, suggesting as the problem is not localised to WA it is to be expected and so no-one should be held to account, this is reasoning is flawed.

"The Chief Psychiatrist allowed St John Ambulance management to identify and make initial contact with those staff and volunteers to be interviewed by the Chief Psychiatrist undermining, in my view, the impartiality of the report.

"When the Minister for Health, Kim Hames announced the investigation he pre-empted its findings by saying it was highly unlikely work pressure was the contributing factor, the report does not disappoint the Minister.

"At the time the investigation was initiated, I said the terms of reference were too narrow and it lacked investigative power to access all relevant information, my concerns have been vindicated.

“The use of the term ‘suspected suicides’ in the report is factually incorrect, the State Coroner has delivered a finding of suicide in one case, this seems to be an attempt to downplay the significance and truth of the situation and is shameful.

“Paramedics and volunteers have raised concerns about systemic structural and resourcing issues within the organisation and a culture of bullying, yet the report doesn’t address these issues and is the reason why a Parliamentary Inquiry is needed.

“The report glosses over the fact that despite knowing at least four of the five people were experiencing difficulties and mental health problems in the form of depression, St John Ambulance persisted in pursuing technical breaches, in some cases of a minor nature, and invoked heavy handed performance management processes to do so rather than informal options, this needs further investigation.

“The report also makes no mention of the letters St John Ambulance provides to paramedics and volunteers as part of the performance management or complaint investigation process that state they are not to discuss the matter with anyone except the St John Ambulance investigating officers, leaving the paramedics and volunteers completely isolated.

“A Parliamentary Inquiry will allow comprehensive investigation to be undertaken and will provide paramedics and volunteers with the protection of parliamentary privilege to encourage them to speak out.

“A culture of bullying and a fear of losing their jobs prevents paramedics and volunteers from fully participating in investigations into St John Ambulance.

“Only a Parliamentary Inquiry will get to the bottom of the issues and provide a framework for a supportive work environment at St John Ambulance for paramedics and volunteers.”

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