

Ambulance paramedics at risk



The verbal assault of a Bairnsdale-based female paramedic has highlighted the danger of paramedics working in isolation, according to the Ambulance Employees Association.

The female paramedic was working alone last week when she was followed by a male driver and threatened at Bairnsdale Hospital. The man was controlled by other paramedics and later arrested by police.

Steve McGhie from the Ambulance Employees Association says the incident highlights the need for paramedics to work in pairs. "It's another example of a paramedic working on their own and potentially being put at risk, it's one of the things we've been advocating for... It just goes to show the risk factors that are involved and we would plead with the ambulance service not to allow paramedics to be working on their own," Mr McGhie told ABC Gippsland.

Mr McGhie says the frequency of single unit officers had increased since rostering systems became centralised in Melbourne.

"Previously what you would have had was the local team manager out of Bairnsdale or Lakes Entrance branch would've managed to try and bring someone back into work... And yes we are seeing many more vacancies at the moment." Mr McGhie says recruitment was failing to keep up with the attrition rate.

"While we might have 30 or 40 additional paramedics across the Gippsland region, the net gain is very minimal and we're not keeping up the pace with demand, Gippsland is one of the lowest resourced regions within the state."

Volunteer community officers were also frequently used to replace a second paid paramedic on shifts, Mr McGhie said.

But Mick Stephenson from Ambulance Victoria says the rate of single officer units, staff working in isolation or with volunteer community officers had not increased.

He says the female paramedic had been working alone because the second rostered officer took sick leave and the shift could not be filled.

"It just happens from time to time, there is considerable effort to find someone, generally on overtime, but unfortunately on this occasion we were unable to do so."

He admitted the centralised rostering systems, which operates from Melbourne, had experienced problems but said the system had improved. "Over the last couple of months we've made some considerable improvement in that area."