

PARAMEDIC SUES FOR £100K OVER ASSAULT

A paramedic who was off work for six months after being attacked by a patient is suing ambulance bosses for £100,000 after claiming they did not tell her the call-out was dangerous.

Lynn Sutherland was punched and kicked by 16-year-old Grahame Donnelly after racing to his home amid fears he had taken an overdose of anti-depressants. The 37-year-old suffered injuries to her arm, ribs, shoulder and neck while trying to restrain the teenager.

Ms Sutherland launched a legal action for damages against the Scottish Ambulance Service at the Court of Session in Edinburgh.

Her lawyers argue that the service failed to warn her that the teenager had already attacked his mother, adding that police should have been in attendance to provide support. Ms Sutherland, who lives in Dalry, was working with colleague, Martin Gemmell, in Livingston when the pair received a message to attend an emergency in Harthill, North Lanarkshire. Her lawyers told the court that ambulance colleagues in Paisley tried to inform the dispatch centre minutes later that it was a “violent scene” and that the patient had attacked his mother. The message triggered a warning bar on a dispatcher’s screen, but she did not see it and failed to inform the crew.

Ms Sutherland and Mr Gemmell arrived at around 10pm and said she met Donnelly’s aunt outside the home but was left with “no reason to suspect the patient was violent”.

Once in the sitting room, Ms Sutherland said that Donnelly’s mother told them she had been assaulted by her son earlier. Ms Sutherland said that the teenager got to his feet and punched her in the jaw, leading to a violent struggle when she was punched and kicked. She alerted police, who arrived at 10.23pm. Four officers, along with the paramedics, restrained the patient.

Her lawyers told the court that Scottish Ambulance Service protocols set out that crews should not work in violent incidents without police support. They argued that had the crew known beforehand, they would have requested police back-up and the dispatch centre’s failure to relay the warning constituted a failure to take “reasonable care”. But lawyers for the service said that it was the teenager’s mother who had been outside the home and warned them of the attack on her.

The service’s lawyers added that it was “not feasible” to “prevent all employees from exposures to violence”.

They contended that the situation would not have been any different if the dispatch centre alerted them over the violent behaviour, or whether the mother did outside. The solicitors firm representing Ms Sutherland, said it did not want to comment. A Scottish Ambulance Service spokesman said it could not comment.