Last month we held our first ever Staff Wellbeing and Resilience Summit, an initiative introduced by Chief Executive Dominic Morgan aimed at addressing the mental health issues faced by our staff.

The event, which was livestreamed online, attracted 300 staff, special guests and speakers from throughout NSW, Australia and overseas who gathered to learn the latest in research and programs available.

In the picturesque surrounds of Sydney’s Le Montage conference centre attendees were greeted by gift bags while many had the opportunity to catch up with colleagues they had not seen in a long time.

However, nothing could detract from the purpose of the day and the sobering facts - one in 10 paramedics experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); 26 Australian paramedics took their own lives between 2000 and 2012.

The room fell silent as a film rolled focussing on “The Elephant in the Room” – a paramedic’s mental and emotional decline as his appearance interchanged between “normal” and the bright pink elephant’s mask that became more prominent with every case of trauma that was experienced.

As Chief Executive Dominic Morgan noted, “The elephant in the room is a very real metaphor for all of us.”

The audience heard from brave staff members who shared their experiences with depression, anxiety, PTSD and the impact of trauma; their presentations greeted with warm support by their paramedic family. Significantly, their experiences traced a path to recovery through the support of their colleagues, loved ones and health care professionals, providing courage and hope for those still seeking their own way forward.

A series of guest speakers underscored the facts - paramedics are at greater risk of mental illness, in fact would not be human if they did not. But there are also causes for hope; breakthroughs in the treatment of illness in emergency service personnel specifically; exciting research that is expected to deliver improvements in the near future.

While it was acknowledged that discussions about mental health have traditionally been difficult, there was no such feeling of discomfort during the Summit. The mood was one of solidarity with a sense ‘a corner had been turned’; a culture was being challenged; and those with the power to usher change were making waves.

As our Chief Executive outlined, there’s no quick fix; no single solution to being well, but there’s room for great optimism as we continue to strengthen our support systems over time.
The journey

In July 1995, Allan experienced the trauma of being called to a home at Crescent Head where two of his police colleagues, one a close friend, had been shot and killed while attending a domestic dispute.

This job was followed by the rescue of an 11-year-old boy who had been swept into a stormwater pipe at Coffs Harbour. The child survived, but it impacted Allan’s already fragile mental state. When he returned to work, he curled up in a shower and sobbed.

Despite knowing he needed help, a fear of losing his career kept him silent. “… it was such a powerful thing that precluded you from seeking help and it’s the same to this day. I know it is. But back then it was automatic, you would lose your job if you spoke up about feeling this way.”

This, together with the fear of losing his mind led Allan to plan ways to take his life. When he began having nightmares about killing his family, it became the final straw. On 4 October 1996 he went to work and took his revolver to the bathroom where he intended to shoot himself. At that same moment a colleague walked in, saw the gun and gently took it from him.

He said, ‘Are you okay mate?’ I said, ‘No, I’m f—ked.’ He said, how about I take you home?’ And that’s what he did.”

Recovery

After months of pain and suffering, and with the support of his wife Deb, Allan visited a crisis counsellor and unleashed the torrent.

He continued to make progress, however in February 1998 he received the crushing news he had been medically discharged from the NSW Police Force.

The setback led him to set his life on a different course – upon the ocean. He bought a 47ft yacht in England and, with his wife and children, set sail on a voyage back to Australia.

Today

Allan, at almost 60 years, trains incredibly hard. Last year he competed in a boxing tournament for Legacy, and still plays rugby union. He eats and sleeps well, gives motivational speeches with wife Deb by his side, and helps others who are suicidal.

Lessons learned:

- For every minute I didn’t get professional help, it cost me an hour of recovery time.
- Sleep deprivation can have a catastrophic effect. The chances of breaking down are increased exponentially, the less sleep you have.

You are critical to our society. You save lives on a daily basis. But we need you to understand the importance of being as physically and mentally fit as you possibly can be to meet the demands of your job and your life.
• Adrenal fatigue is an area of discussion. If you’re not sleeping or eating well, not exercising and drinking too much, physiologically your adrenal glands and cortisone levels will become imbalanced. Some research suggests this leads to a risk of developing mental illness.

ADVICE:
• Highlight those who have recovered and come back to work – those stories of positivity and hope are really very important.
• It’s not just a case of suddenly you can’t cope, it’s a gradual process. It’s a physiological change that takes place you just don’t suddenly feel like you can’t cope. So the more education we can bring in that leads to understanding, acceptance and an eventual cultural change for the better.
• First responders need to develop a system of closing off to emotion on the job, but not altogether.

Deb Sparkes-Swain
A PARTNER’S PERSPECTIVE

Deb said that while the resilience and strength of her marriage provided Allan with the support he needed, she initially felt guilty for not recognising how much Allan was struggling.

While awareness of PTSD was not prevalent at the time, Deb said that with the benefit of hindsight, she saw he had changed. “I knew his work was suffering; he’d stopped exercising; he was making excuses not to be involved with the local rugby union club. He was drinking more but I didn’t realise how much.”

She did not seek any support for herself and it was “more luck than good management” that she got through without any serious impact on her own mental health.

Deb said the biggest problem is when a person who is unwell doesn’t realise it or they want to ignore it in the hope it goes away.

ADVICE:
• For managers; make contact and be supportive of your staff. Give them a call. Go and have a cup of tea with them.
• Making sure people stay engaged with their workplace is important. The longer it takes for the person to re-engage, the more difficult it is. If people can just call in and see them, or they can feel comfortable to call in and have morning tea, that helps.
• Websites such as beyondblue are invaluable for providing advice and support for family and friends.
Encouraging an attitude of acceptance and openness about mental health among paramedics and call takers, and reducing mental illness before it reaches crisis point, to in turn reduce pressure on NSW Ambulance, were the key components of an address by John Feneley.

Mr Feneley said the taboo of discussing mental illness among first responders must end and be replaced by a culture of openness and self-agency, which involves being aware of the risks, preventing illness where possible and intervening early when it occurs.

“Every first responder is entitled to our honesty… If the individual is prepared; they are more likely to seek help if they experience problems, without shame or fear.

“(First responders) are absolutely vital to our community’s health and wellbeing. You cannot meet other people’s trauma and stress unless you acknowledge that it will have on impact on you over time.”

THE FACTS:

- **Between 2000 and 2012, 110** Australian paramedics, police officers and fire fighters died by suicide – 26 paramedics, 62 police and 22 fire fighters – most were men aged between 30 and 39.

- **One in five Ambulance Victoria workers who underwent mental health assessments exhibited psychological problems ranging from mild to extreme.**

- **There are thousands of sick and medically discharged paramedics, police officers and fire fighters around Australia suffering alienation and despair.**

THE DEVELOPMENTS AND INITIATIVES

- We’re seeing a shift from the old, reactive model of care to a model of care that promotes wellbeing and looking after yourself. “Your jobs will never be done if we continue down the path (of responding to crisis). We need a whole-of-life approach and strong community supports so that people don’t reach a crisis point as often as they currently do.”

- Access to digital/online resources to ensure people have access to the information they need and the pathways to services, irrespective of where they are.

- Employers are working with health care providers, realising the enormous investment in their staff and that it’s only by understanding the broader wellbeing needs of their workforce that they’ll get the best out of their people.

“You are undoubtedly trusted members of our community and admired for serving a cause greater than yourselves. Yet the relentless exposure to dramatic events will take its toll. It’s entirely natural, it should be expected and we should build a system around it.”
MICHEAL PIETRUS
DIRECTOR OF MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID CANADA

THE MESSAGE
Micheal Pietrus spoke about the stigma of mental health and how it has traditionally prevented people from seeking help early.

“One of the nasty things about stigma is that people are often reluctant to come forward, even when they know they are experiencing problems,” he said.

ROAD TO MENTAL READINESS (R2MR) PROGRAM
Micheal said a key education-based program being rolled out in Canada was Road to Mental Readiness (R2MR), which aims to reduce stigma while helping people identify if they are experiencing problems, encouraging them to seek help when problems first emerge and teaching coping strategies.

He said there was traditionally a black and white approach to mental illness – if you’re healthy you stay on duty; if you’re not healthy you are taken off duty. “R2MR reconceptualises how we look at mental illness. Mental health exists on a continuum – on any given day you are somewhere on that continuum in terms of how well you are doing,” he said.

Rather than applying a blanket label of mental illness, the program is based on colour-coded scale where people identify where they are on the continuum and implement coping strategies accordingly.

Factors to watch include sleeping difficulties and mood changes, such as withdrawal and self-imposed isolation.

“If you see things popping up you can begin to use coping strategies to get you back into the green (on the scale),” he said.

Successful methods include contact-based education where people who have lived and experienced a mental health problem and have been able to manage or recover, are brought forward, thus providing hope that recovery is possible.

“We’ve found that first responders like to hear from someone who is working in the same field,” Micheal said.

COPING STRATEGIES
Affectionately known as “The Big Four”, the following strategies are well proven:

1. SMART (Specific Measurable Attainable Timely) goal setting – for example, breaking down a goal into simpler, easier to achieve tasks and coming up with the ultimate objective that you’re trying to reach.
3. Positive self-talk – for example, “You have been trained; you know what to do.”
4. Diaphramatic breathing (tactical breathing) – introducing more oxygen into the blood by regulating your breathing and calming yourself down.

We need to change the culture – how we look at mental illness and make things a lot more comfortable in terms of allowing people to come forward and seek help. Also to make sure the support is there for them.
Dr Sam Harvey focused on the exciting developments and research and that is underway into mental illness, specifically that experienced by emergency service workers.

Dr Harvey previously worked as a psychiatrist for the London Ambulance Service before returning to Sydney 2012 to start a program of research in conjunction with the University of NSW and the Black Dog Institute with an evidence-based approach to mental health.

**KEY QUESTIONS BEING ADDRESSED BY RESEARCH:**

- What type of problems do emergency service workers suffer from?
  
  Four key symptom clusters of PTSD: system arousal; re-experiencing i.e. nightmares and flashbacks, avoidance and negative cognitions. This is together with other mental health issues including depression and anxiety.

- How is that related to work?

  Studies/findings include:
  
  A study on cumulative trauma in NSW firefighters shows the more trauma a person is exposed to the higher the risk of PTSD.

  A study of UK paramedics shows traumatic events are important, but so too are day-to-day aspects including inter-personal conflict, change that’s poorly managed and a sense of inadequate reward for effort.

  Research into war veterans who’ve served in the Middle East is looking at the role of team cohesion and good leadership.

- What do we now know about what we should be doing for emergency workers who become unwell?

  For psychological treatments, there are two types that have evidence-based success above all others:

  1. Trauma Focus Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.
  2. Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing therapy.

  Dr Harvey said there are two sides of recovery – treating both the symptoms and the functional aspects of recovery, such as returning to work when the workplace has been the trigger for the PTSD.

**HOW CAN WE PREVENT PEOPLE FROM BECOMING UNWELL?**

Studies/research underway:

- A manager training program which builds skills so people feel confident when contacting unwell staff members. A study with Fire & Rescue NSW showed that those who received the training were more confident than those who didn’t; they were significantly more likely to contact staff who were off sick; and there was a 15 per cent reduction in workers compensation leave.

- Online mindfulness training program - Resilience At Work.

- Development of a mobile phone app that evaluates a person’s risk; another that enables a person to screen themselves and which directs them to online treatments.

*Research indicates one in 10 paramedics have PTSD.*
The Peer Support Program at NSW Ambulance aims to provide all staff with someone to talk to who can relate to their experiences and link them in with professional support services when required. Peer support officers (PSOs) provide confidential, practical, emotional support and assistance to colleagues.

In order to ensure that PSOs consistently provide the best standard of support available, it is essential that they refresh their skills and revise industry best practice. Our Peer Support Team Coordinator, Vicky Gabriel, has now delivered a total of 18 sessions of PSO refresher training throughout NSW, with a total of 115 PSOs having received the training thus far.

The training reviewed the role of peer support at NSW Ambulance and the importance of referring staff to professional supports when required for more specialised assistance. It also included a review of the risk of harm to self and others, as well as training around global best practice in post incident support. The training also included a session entitled ‘role modelling self-care’, which focuses on the importance of PSOs looking after themselves to prevent burnout and compassion fatigue, as well as demonstrating what it looks like to look after yourself.

If you have any questions about the Peer Support Program or how to contact a PSO, please contact Peer Support Team Coordinator, Vicky Gabriel at vgabriel@ambulance.nsw.gov.au.
Currently 68 per cent of NSW Ambulance staff on myShift have received the flu shot.

Have you told us if you’ve had the flu shot? It’s extremely important that all staff logon to myShift, to let us know whether you’ve had the flu shot or not. Currently a staff member behind the scenes is working very hard to ensure we have accurate data of how many staff have been vaccinated. Even if you received the shot privately from your GP, it’s important you log this on myShift so we are able to create an accurate snapshot of how NSW Ambulance is progressing.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS SEASON’S FLU

According to the NSW Health Influenza Surveillance Report* seasonal influenza activity continues to rise, particularly in metropolitan areas. For the week ending 24 July 2016, the below trends were noticed:

- The rate of influenza-like illness (ILI) presentations to selected Emergency Departments (EDs) rose sharply and remain well above the seasonal threshold.
- The proportion of ILI presentations to all ED presentations increased to 2.3 per 1000 presentations, higher than the previous week.
- A total of 6238 tests for respiratory viruses were reported this week with 18.7 per cent testing positive for influenza viruses, up from 4552 tests and a 14.3 per cent influenza-positive rate in the previous week.
- Local Health Districts (LHDs) noticed there were 915 notifications of influenza confirmed by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing, higher than the 682 notifications in the previous week.
- Rates continued to be high in Nepean Blue Mountains, rates were also high in Northern Sydney and Western Sydney LHDs. Compared to the previous week, notifications increased across the majority of local health districts.

As you can see from the graph below, we have not yet reached the peak of the flu season yet. This means if you haven’t received your flu shot yet, there is still time to get it.

Looking after your most vulnerable patients

Our elderly patients are some of the most vulnerable that we treat. This is why it’s important to protect ourselves against the flu which in turn protects our patients. For the week ending 24 July there were 13 new respiratory outbreaks reported, all were in aged care facilities.

In the year to date, the report also showed that there have been at least 402 residents living in aged care or disability facilities who were reported to have had ILI symptoms, with 42 requiring hospitalisation. Twenty-six deaths in residents linked to these outbreaks have been reported, all of whom were noted to have other significant comorbidities.

*Information according to NSW Health report, current as of 24 July 2016.
IN MY VIEW

Beautiful sunrise shot taken at Coleambally by paramedic Merryn Ludlow.
**HEALTHY WORKPLACE STRATEGIES**

Every month the Healthy Workplace Strategies team brings you updates about physical and mental health. This month, we’re looking at the value of high intensity exercise and the upcoming R U OK Day.

**HIGH-INTENSITY VERSUS LOW-INTENSITY EXERCISE**

Trends come and go in health, fitness and nutrition. The latest trend in fitness is High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) as it’s one of the quickest and most efficient ways to get fit and new evidence suggests that it has some surprising metabolic benefits.

**HOW CAN I ADD IN HIGH-INTENSITY EXERCISE INTO MY WORKOUT?**

Assuming that you are in good general and cardiovascular health, you can incorporate high-intensity elements into your workout which will ultimately help you get fitter, faster.

If you’re at the gym, incorporate high-intensity exercise with classes such as cycle or spin classes. The other alternative in the gym is to jump on a piece of cardio equipment such as a bike, stepper, rower or treadmill and crank the workload, speed and/or incline up high and do a few minutes of 30-60 sec intense exercise and 30-120 sec easy/rest. At home, go for a jog around the block or at the park with short sprints.

**MAINTAINING YOUR HIGH-INTENSITY WORKOUT**

After a couple of sessions, increase the time you’re alternating from high-intensity to low-intensity to 10-15 minutes. However, remember to work on increasing the intensity rather than the duration. With the leftover time from the shorter cardio session, you could try some strength training and more stretching – very important for injury prevention. You can also use a device such as a heart rate monitor to measure the intensity of your intervals. This can be useful as it helps you to track how you’re going and also motivates you to exceed your previous goal.

**WHAT DO I DO IF SOMEONE IS NOT OK?**

**Ask R U OK?**

- Start a conversation somewhere private. This could be one-on-one on-road, in a meeting room in the office, on station or in a local coffee shop.
- Build trust through open and relaxed body language. An example of keeping your posture open is not crossing your arms. Make eye contact and use non-verbal cues, such as nodding your head.
- Ask open-ended questions. For example, “I’ve noticed you haven’t been yourself lately. How are things going?”

**Listen without judgement**

- Give them time to reply. If they don’t want to open up, say something like, “I can see that you don’t want to talk right now, that’s fine. Let me know if you want to talk later.” Then check in on them again at a later stage.
- Avoid solving their problems. Help them to come to their own solution by asking open ended questions.
- Don’t trivialise what they’re feeling by saying, for example, “It’s just part of the job”, “That’s not such a big deal” or “You’ll be right, mate.” Instead, say statements like, “Sounds like that job got to you” or “You sound upset”.

**Encourage action**

- Summarise the issues raised. Confirm your understanding of what they’re saying to you.
- Ask them what they plan to do.
- Urge them to take action, like contacting Staff Support Services or their GP.

Follow up

- Put a note in your diary to check in with them again in one week.
- Again listen without judgement.
- Ask if they’ve managed to take the first step. If they haven’t, again encourage them to. Offer to sit with them while they call the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or offer to contact Healthy Workplace Strategies on their behalf to get the ball rolling.

For further information go to [https://www.ruok.org.au](https://www.ruok.org.au). Remember there are a variety of support services available to you on the intranet [here](https://www.ruok.org.au).

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**This year, we’ll join together on Thursday 8 September to recognise RU OK? Day, an initiative that NSW Ambulance is proud to support. Following on from our Staff Wellbeing and Resilience Summit, we’re acknowledging the value of taking the time to check in on our mental health - not just on R U OK? Day, but every day of the year.**
**MINUTE WITH ... PETER O'DONNELL**

Communications Educator

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**Do you think being healthy is easy or is it something that you’re used to doing?**

When I was younger it was easy, I was slim and healthy regardless of what I ate or the activity I did. The combination of entering middle-age, having kids and doing shift-work in a control centre meant I ended up putting on lots of weight and was very inactive. I had a realisation and took positive steps to change my habits. This was difficult at first, but after a while it became very rewarding and is now an enjoyable part of my life.

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**What’s an exercise or leisure activity you enjoy doing and why?**

I have always been a keen body-surfer and I like to swim laps. I find laps meditative and enjoy the feeling when I get out of the pool, plus it makes me better at body-surfing! I have also begun practicing fencing again which has been a motivating factor for me to get fitter. I love fencing, as it exercises both brain and body.

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**Do you set fitness goals for yourself and if so, what’s your current target?**

My target is to get as fit as I can but avoid injury. My body is not as pliable as it was 15 years ago, so I have limited the distance I swim and I try (often in vain) not to do things in fencing that I used to do when I was 18. I often pay for the rush of adrenalin after a bout with painful knees or hips. My goal is to exercise most days of the week and also focus on healthy eating.

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**Have you always been into fitness or has it been a challenging ‘relationship’?**

I had over 10 years of being a couch-potato; I got to size 112 in trousers and had a few chins. Then I decided it was limiting my ability to run around with my kids and in my late-forties, realised it would begin to have serious health consequences. I wanted to be around a bit longer for my family as they grew up. I found that as I lost weight and got fit, my self-esteem improved hugely. These days I never see a mirror I don’t like.

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**Talk to us about diet, do you have any tips or magic secret recipes?**

I went on the 5:2 fast diet. Eat normally five days a week and fast for two non-consecutive days. This was very successful for me and after six to eight months I needed to order new pants! Having lost weight, I could then take up exercise – swimming, fencing, running and gym. At the moment I still fast one day a week.

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**What would be your top three tips to living a healthy lifestyle?**

1. Exercising does not lose weight effectively, only reduced calorie intake does. If you go to the gym and then have a donut and an ice-cream, you may get fit, but will not lose weight.

2. Fasting is not for everyone, but it has other proven benefits including emotional and cognitive. It is highly motivating when the trousers start feeling too big and this only takes a month or two.

3. Healthy lifestyle is something to share with the family. Rather than sitting on the couch watching television we go for a walk, play outdoors or go to the local pool. The Fitness Passport is a fantastic deal. See more info [here](#).

I think my experience has been a positive example for my kids; they both play sport and have set their own goals, such as reaching the zone swimming carnivals.
I have a great family, but I’ll admit it does get a bit crazy! The kids, dogs, cats, guinea pigs, chickens, cows, alpacas and my wife Kim – that’s us!

Growing up in Woy Woy, I coached swimming before heading off to the UK where I was a lifeguard in North Cornwall. On returning to Australia, I managed a swimming pool, continued with coaching and was preparing to lease another pool when I saw an advertisement to become a paramedic, I applied and was successful! Currently I’m based at Moruya about four hours south of Sydney. I’ve been here for almost three years; prior to that I was in Helensburgh for five years, Cooma for 10 and Sydney before that.

There are a lot of things I like about my role; the friendships, the morning chats over coffee, interactions with other stakeholders, the meaningful and diverse work, as well as the different work locations. The same reasons I joined 20 years ago are still well and truly at the forefront; I find working as a paramedic a very rewarding balance of looking after my own interests as well as giving back to community. I’ve experienced many highlights, particularly the times I have been involved in jobs where our team has done well and the work has been rewarding. These times remind you just how important your job is to the community and allows you to really value the work of your colleagues. The ongoing friendships with colleagues is very much a highlight and I have been shown a lot of kindness and support over the years. I get quite excited when I run into people I’ve worked with or hear them on the radio. It’s not above me to give a man hug if I haven’t seen them for a while!

Currently I’m acting Station Officer and the most challenging part of this job is trying to fit in the management work between being on the job and treating patients. I like to finish a job before leaving it, so I have learnt to chip away at a few tasks at once and not get frustrated when I have to come back and finish them. As an on-road paramedic, the challenge has been to keep up with the organisation’s changes regarding patient care. We are given great responsibility in our roles and quite often this change can feel overwhelming until you understand how and why it has occurred. I understand NSW Ambulance’s need to change and even though sometimes it seems uncomfortable, change is inevitable so it’s best to go with it and assess the positives and the negatives, and raise issues if you identify a problem. I have always found the best way to navigate the change is by focusing on my job, being up-to-date and understanding the protocols, pharmacology and skills I need to know.

When I’m not at work I’m working on our farm or doing my favourite activities – there’s always plenty to do! We have five children so we try to get to the beach as often as we can and surf, spear fish or get abalone and...
lobsters. We all have motor bikes and
we ride around the property and on
some trails in the nearby bush. I also
go riding with a couple of paramedics
from Batemans Bay Station. I am
passionate about living life to the
fullest and as a result I’ve played as
many sports as I could fit in; surfing,
soccer, rugby league, rugby union and
snow skiing.

My two biggest passions however
have been music and surf lifesaving
(surfboat rowing and coaching). I
have played in bands since I was
young and am still playing now with a
mate who I met in the same class when

we joined NSW Ambulance. We both
brought our guitars to Rozelle, and
we’ve kept gigging and jamming with
other ambus along the way. I’ve also
been involved in surf lifesaving since
I was five years old and I appreciate
how much this activity helped me
develop in my youth. I started rowing
boats when I was 16, and in 1997, I
achieved the highest accolade in the
sport nationally when our crew won the
Open Men’s Division of the Australian
Surf Titles at the Gold Coast.

Surf lifesaving has allowed me to
realise my abilities individually and as
a part of a team. It showed me from
an early age that a team is strong, fun
and can achieve really great things. I
take this mentality to work all the time; respecting and understanding the team
dynamic helps me to hold up my end,
maintain a healthy working relationship
with my colleagues and hopefully
provide for best possible outcomes.

I have a great family, but I’ll admit it
does get a bit crazy! The kids, dogs,
cats, guinea pigs, chickens, cows,
apacas and my wife Kim – that’s us!
Kim manages everything very well.
She’s one of the hardest working
people I know – working from six in
the morning until eight at night every
day. We do try to help and to give
her sleep-ins when we can! Our five
kids range from 10 through to 17 and
are all uniquely different people. We
encourage them to pursue everything
they want to do; to try hard, do their
best and be good people. They like
the farm and most of the time they
are keen to put up with one of my
lessons on how things work! I believe
in trusting them and when we’re at the
farm and it’s a safe activity, I like them
to be hands on. If it’s not, they’ll watch
and learn. Our house is often noisy
but fun. One of my favourite things to
do with the kids is to go to the shed,
light the fire, cook sausage sandwiches
and check out the stars. I enjoy these
activities and always try to maintain
my balance of work, life, family and
’self’ as they are all so importantly
intertwined.

Something that I know for sure is
that life is a journey of moments,
moments have to happen (good or
bad) and perception is pivotal to how
we deal with them. I am extremely
grateful that I am healthy (although a
bit heavier and grey haired now), that
I have a great family, a great job, great
colleagues, great friends and a great
life, I am truly blessed.
ON STATION WITH WESTERN CONTROL CENTRE

THE TOURIST BROCHURE FOR DUBBO, WHERE THE WESTERN CONTROL CENTRE IS BASED, SAYS:

Dubbo is the perfect spot in country NSW for a family holiday. Taronga Western Plains Zoo in Dubbo is a major attraction for visitors to the area. This 300-hectare open-range sanctuary houses more than 700 animals, including many rare and endangered species. There are plenty of other things to see and do in the Dubbo area. Take a heritage walk to admire Dubbo’s historic buildings or visit the Western Plains Cultural Centre; check out Old Dubbo Gaol, which recreates 19th century prison life; enjoy lunch at tranquil Shoyoen Sister City Garden or a relaxing horse riding lesson at the Western Plains Riding Centre.

THE STAFF AT THE CONTROL CENTRE SAY:

Being the smallest control centre in the state, we are a very close knit group and take pride in looking after each other. We often have fundraising initiatives to support our staff, their families or community events. Our social club always keeps us well stocked with lots of goodies and lotto tickets - we will win big one of these days! Jim and Michelle (our awesome cleaners) are the highlight of our night shifts here in western.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE?

As we cover a large area of NSW which is very remote, it means there can be lengthy responses in getting our crews to isolated locations. In some instances, we rely heavily on our CFR and VAO units to respond and standby until a crew arrives on scene. We also service many small rural hospitals which rely on our crews to transport patients to larger health facilities for further treatment. It’s a constant challenge maintaining area coverage, service delivery and managing paramedic fatigue.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY MOST ABOUT WORKING IN YOUR AREA?

The diversity of cases we deal with and the logistical challenges we face daily. The majority of staff are multiskilled with all staff from duty control centre officers to control centre officers undertaking call taking and dispatching roles on each block of shifts. This ensures all staff maintain their skills and also provides a very cohesive working environment, particularly in the event of major incidents.

The majority of staff are multiskilled with all staff undertaking call taking and dispatching roles on each block of shifts.
Being the smallest control centre in the state, we are a very close knit group and take pride in looking after each other.

Also, not having to sit in peak hour traffic to get to work each day and the relaxed lifestyle of living in the country is pretty good!

**WHAT ARE SOME OF WESTERN CONTROL’S MOST MEMORABLE JOBS?**

Last year, we managed a very high profile case where two patients were trapped down a well in Enngonia near the Queensland border with no mobile phone reception. It was an extremely difficult extrication in a confined, vertical space. We dispatched road paramedics, a helicopter and an Air Ambulance fixed wing plane.

**WHAT’S YOUR MOTTO?**

Welcome to the Centre of Excellence.

**ANY STAFF NEWS FROM WESTERN CONTROL?**

Welcome to Elaine Baird, our newest call taker who is currently undertaking her training at Rozelle. Control Centre Officer Cameron Bruce has recently completed his VAO training in Gilgandra and tied the knot with the love of his life Shaunie. Andrew Begovic and Kathryn Playford both received a Certificate of Appreciation at Appreciation Day for their participation in the ‘No Excuse for Triple Zero (000) Abuse’ campaign. Kathryn has also undertaken a project to provide support to our VAO and CFR units, travelling to far west NSW to oversee the roll-out of the project.

We’ve also recently had a fundraiser for something that’s very close to our hearts. Control Centre Officer Chris Storer is a beloved member of the Western Control Centre family and recently his baby Keiley (pictured above) was diagnosed with laryngomalacia. This is a condition where the soft cartilage of the upper larynx collapses inward during inhalation, causing an airway obstruction and very noisy breathing. Keiley was diagnosed at just eight weeks old with laryngomalacia, as well as severe gastro oesophageal reflux disease and Sandifer Syndrome, a paediatric medical disorder. Since then, she has been transferred to Westmead Children’s Hospital twice for airway surgery. Keiley is now almost one and has not had any more breathing problems, however her condition is still life threatening and needs to be monitored very closely.

We recently had a fundraiser for Keiley and you can read more about this on the NSW Ambulance intranet [here](#).
IN THE MEDIA

Media coverage for July was all about thanking and recognising our staff. This included the publicity that resulted from our NSW Ambulance Appreciation Day, the retirement of several veteran paramedics, a reunion for an assisted baby delivery and safety advice for sporting injuries was also included for good measure.

WELL-DESERVED HONOURS
While Appreciation Day on 29 June was not actively promoted in the metro area, it received generous coverage in the NSW regional areas, with awards recipients followed up and comment sought from paramedics.

SPECIAL DELIVERY
Channel Seven profiled paramedics Alexandra Nesich and Joanne McElgunn who were reunited with the family whose baby they helped deliver on the M5. It was also Alexandra’s first delivery!

THANK YOU AND FAREWELL
Seven paramedics - Dave Reid, Phil Moore, John Playford, Russell Lewis, Ken Iles, Tim Taylor and Pearce Benson - were profiled for their retirements after decades of service to NSW Ambulance and the community.

WHEN SPORT TURNS PAINFUL
NSW Ambulance proactively issued a media release on the prevention of sports injuries and first aid advice in the event a mishap (or worse) occurs.
This month we focused on our Staff Wellbeing and Resilience Summit on social media as well as highlighting media events and NSW Ambulance activities.

**STAFF WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE SUMMIT**

During the Summit we kept our staff and members of the public involved with key events and topics via social media channels.

Other events and activities include:

- **Paramedic Dave**: "PTSD doesn't mean the end of your career. Put up your hand, ask for help. I did & I'm better for it."
- **Some days my head is full of sunshine, sometimes a bit of cloud, sometimes rain. Sharing insights #NSWAResilience**

**OTHER EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES**

- Paramedics Dean and Laura spending some time together with local families at the Inner City NAIDOC Family and Sports Day at Rushcutters Bay. #NAIDOCWeek #NSWAResilience
- "Wet and cold -- but still smiling! Our Special Operations paramedics participate in remote area access training in the Blue Mountains." #NSWambulance

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Remember, we would love to see your photos, email: socialmedia@ambulance.nsw.gov.au or text: 0427 488 239 with a brief explanation about what is happening in the picture and we will endeavor to post it on social media and marketing channels. Follow us!
Letters of Appreciation

Alex offered to stay on the phone with me until the ambulance arrived, which was an extremely big help and reassurance for me. Just wanted to thank you for your patience and for staying calm, despite my clear state of panic. This was a fantastic first-time experience for me calling Triple Zero (000) and it’s great to know that if anything like this occurs in the future I have people I can rely on.

When ambo Dan arrived he brought instant calm into the house. He told me some anecdotes that made me feel a lot more calm about everything. I realised soon enough that my son’s wound was not going to warrant any major treatment, just some glue - but even so, I was not made to feel terrible for calling the ambulance. Dan also put on the ambulance lights and gave my son a great memory of his first encounter with a real ambulance! I would like to thank Dan from my whole family for helping my son with his first big accident in life and bringing a compassion and warmth to the job. He is a really great ambassador for NSW Ambulance. I would also like to thank the lady on dispatch who helped me with administering first aid during the initial shock and what to do with my son when I was losing it. She was brilliant.

I am 15 years old and have always wanted to become a paramedic. Ever since my brother’s accident the urge for me to become a paramedic has been stronger than ever because of these two paramedics who helped him. Not only would I like to thank these inspirational women for what they did that day, but also for what they have done for me.
My partner and I were transported by ambulance to the Maitland Hospital after my waters broke at only 33 weeks gestation. I was fortunate to have two lovely paramedics from Beresfield in that ambulance. I would like to thank Aaron and his partner for that morning. They kept the mood cheerful in what was a stressful time for us. The two paramedics that transported us from the Maitland Hospital to John Hunter Hospital were terrific under pressure, which included a midwife in the back of the ambulance as well as my premature baby was born in the back of the ambulance while turning on to the Sandgate bypass! They were great while the midwife was telling them to go faster as I was just about to have the baby, then great as she yelled at them to stop as my baby was born, followed by her yelling to go faster again as we needed to get to the hospital with the baby. Sadly, our baby’s birth certificate states she was born in the John Hunter Hospital - however we know the truth, she was born in the back of an ambulance at Sandgate!

Such massive thanks to the four paramedics we were blessed to have that morning. Thank you really isn’t strong enough, no words are! Here’s a photo so they can see the miracle they were a part of!

I believe that it was due to their professionalism, knowledge and caring that I still have my mum alive with me today. Words are not available to me to express my gratitude.

They were aware that I was very anxious and by the time they had finished all of their observations I was quite calm. They even offered to make me a cup of tea.

I would like to pass on my thanks to David and his colleague from Belrose Station who assisted my father who is a quadriplegic and was suffering a very high temperature and was not very responsive.

Both paramedics acted in a professional and caring manner from the time they arrived to when we got to hospital. They had to use a hoist to transport my father from his wheelchair to the stretcher bed and they did this with great care. The officers were aware of my worry and concerns and they acted in such a calm, efficient manner that made me assured he was in good hands.

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Nick from Green Valley station took this photo at Bringelly. “These are our new probationers at Green Valley, I was teaching them how to do a visual tyre inspection”.

Hillston Station’s six-wheeler ambulance vehicle - affectionately known as ‘Fiona’ - and the Snowy Hydro Helicopter taken at Griffith Airport after treating a patient.

A chilly Cabramurra - Australia’s highest town - while our paramedics took part in an inter-agency exercise organised by the Snowy Hydro.

Western Sydney paramedics take part in the Hawkesbury Relay for Life event.

Paramedics Ana and Grant with Royal Australian Navy Leading Seaman Medic Ellie Breen at the Hurstville station. Ellie is conducting a six week placement with us as part of her course.

NSW Ambulance and NSW SES deliver medication to an elderly male cut off by flood water in Bathurst.

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