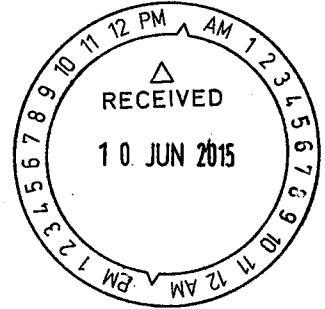




**Deputy Premier of Western Australia
Minister for Health**

Our Ref: 25-46604



Hon Simon O'Brien MLC
Chairman
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

Dear Mr *Simon* O'Brien

Thank you for your letter of 20 May 2015 regarding Petition No 86 – St John Ambulance Employee Deaths by Suicide.

The Acting Director General of the Department of Health, Professor Bryant Stokes, asked the Chief Psychiatrist to undertake a Review into the suspected suicide of five people who worked as Paramedics or Volunteers with St John Ambulance WA. The deaths of all these people occurred in the 16 months to 30 March 2015. The purpose of this Review was to determine the factors that may have contributed to their death and, particularly, whether their role as a Paramedic or Volunteer may have played a part in their deaths. The Terms of Reference of this Review is appended.

The Chief Psychiatrist is anticipating that the Review will be completed by the end of July this year. At the completion of the Review, the Chief Psychiatrist will be delivering a report to the Acting Director General with his findings and with any recommendations that he thinks necessary that may assist St John Ambulance to understand the emotional and psychological impact of work and non-work stressors on the well-being of their staff and volunteers. While the findings and recommendations will be publicly released, the information regarding individuals will be kept confidential.

Additionally, St John Ambulance has established an Independent Oversight Panel to examine its management, workplace culture and the well-being of staff and volunteers. Its members are Dr Neale Fong, Chairman of the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention and Mr Ian Taylor, Chairman of Rural Health Workforce Australia. Professor Alexander McFarlane, Director of the University of Adelaide Centre for Traumatic Stress Studies, has been invited to join the Panel. The Panel will be commencing its work in the first week of June 2015 with a call for submissions from all staff, volunteers, other interested parties and the general public.

St John Ambulance has also engaged the Australian Centre for Post Traumatic Mental Health based at the University of Melbourne to evaluate its existing staff support services and advise on the best approach for ensuring the well-being of its staff and volunteers.

In my view, the processes that have been put in place by the Department of Health and St John Ambulance WA are broad ranging and will address not only the role of work and non-work factors contributing to the death of the five St John Paramedics and Volunteers, but will also investigate the broader questions raised by the petitioner with regard the management and culture of the organisation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'KH', written over a horizontal line.

Dr Kim Hames MLA
DEPUTY PREMIER
MINISTER FOR HEALTH

Att:

9 JUN 2015

Chief Psychiatrist's Review: St John Ambulance Paramedic and Volunteer Suspected Suicides

Terms of Reference

The Chief Psychiatrist will consider the factors contributing to these deaths, and specifically consider the requirements of their role as a 'first responder'- Paramedic or Ambulance Volunteer- which may have contributed to the deaths. Individual, cohort or systemic factors may be considered in this review.

The Chief Psychiatrist will make findings and any appropriate recommendations that may assist SJA to determine the best approach to deal with the emotional and psychological impact of work and non-work stresses that impact the wellbeing of their staff and volunteers.

The Chief Psychiatrist acknowledges the coronial review of these individual cases as a separate process, and would provide the final report, through the A/DG to the State Coroner, if required.

The Review procedure will include:

- Examination of any available health records (consent will need to be obtained from the surviving next of kin both to participate in the review and to access health records of the deceased)
- Interviews with appropriate third parties, which may include surviving family members or work colleagues, among others
- Examination of information available to SJA relating to each case. This includes, although is not restricted to, the ambulance case history of each first responder
- Examination of SJA policies or programs, so far as their relevance to the comprehensive understanding of the individual or cohort of cases at the time of their deaths
- The Chief Psychiatrist may consider any relevant literature, reports, expert commentary or jurisdictional data relating to suicide and first-responders

Limitations to the Review

The Chief Psychiatrist will not specifically seek to evaluate the existing wellbeing and support services provided by SJA. Although, any other concurrent review process would not limit the impartiality or capacity of the Chief Psychiatrist to comment or make recommendations on individual or systemic issues that might be identified as relevant in this review.

The Chief Psychiatrist does not have statutory power to require release of clinical, health record or other information as relates to an individual who may be receiving mental health care as a voluntary patient. The availability of any potential health records to provide an objective assessment of clinical or emotional impairment will be very relevant to provide a more complete understanding in this review. The absence of health records may impact on the extent to which the Chief Psychiatrist can comment in those specific cases.

Any limitations within this review will not limit further coronial investigation, if determined as required by the State Coroner.