



The NASRA meeting in Donegal earlier this month

## PUSHING AHEAD IN DONEGAL

I wish to thank all those who attended our recent meeting in Letterkenny. The attendance reflects our steady rise in the North-West despite the most concerted effort of management to obstruct us, including the removal of NASRA notices, and more recently the refusal of Tullamore to process membership applications nationally. What will they try next?

An ICO member at the meeting expressed concern that the telephone allowance was not being paid. We will be looking into this matter urgently. There were also calls for union cards and badges which we hope we will have in the new year. A talk by Corkmarket Insurance which outlined the benefits of membership, including a salary protection scheme, AVC's and financial health checks. We would also like to congratulate Leonard Wilkie, a NASRA member, on his recent election as health and safety representative in the Donegal area, where he secured the vast majority of votes cast. Leonard is well suited for this role as in his own time he is currently studying to complete a degree in health and safety. We wish him every success in this difficult role.

## MAYO MEETING

Thanks to all who turned out our meeting in Castlebar recently. The meeting heard concerns about a member who failed to get the representation he deserved and we wish to acknowledge that in this case mistakes were made at a time when NASRA was in its infancy. Lessons have been learned and with changes in personal, and better communications in place, we will prevent similar situations occurring in the future.

## HAVING NASRA AT YOUR BACK – ONE MEMBER'S STORY

I joined the National Ambulance Service ten years ago, leaving a career in the private sector where union membership was never a feature.

At that time, and with limited choice in, or understanding of union representation, I formed the opinion that joining the union who appeared to represent the majority of NAS personnel was the sensible choice so, I signed up.

However, I soon realised a level of dissatisfaction with those who claimed to represent me, who claimed to safeguard my rights, and who consistently agreed to a catalogue of unfair demands in my name but, without consulting me. Because of this, I made the decision to join NASRA, a union dedicated only to representing statutory ambulance personnel employed by the NAS.

I never expected that a day would come where I found myself on the receiving end of workplace events that greatly affected me

and that fell within the remit of the HSE Dignity at Work Policy. As someone who had never had the experience before, the process was alien to me from the outset, and necessitated a lengthy period of formal investigation over a period of two and a half years.

NASRA's support was consistent throughout the process, and at no time did I feel I was not supported or represented. Communication and transparency were always maintained and the end result substantiated the issues I was compelled to submit.

I'm not a union activist, and I'm not a politician but because of my own experiences, I am now passionate about fairness and transparency in our workplace and I understand the true value and importance of being part of a union that is focussed on representing members like me in our dealings with the NAS.

I would like to thank NASRA for the help and support they gave to me and continue to show to others.

**Sinead**

## NASRA DEMANDS FAIRNESS FOR STUDENTS

Our new student members have complained that the full course syllabus of their intern postgraduate course is not in some cases being provided to all students. They have brought to our attention that in some cases they only receive three, and in some instances only two quarterly assessments. As you are aware continuous assessment is becoming more common place across the education system and is a welcome improvement over written exam only for obvious reasons.

However, if a student is expected to achieve a pass mark of 70% then UCD should ensure that all students are provided with access to the full amount of marks on offer and in some cases, should not be expected to achieve 70% out of fifty percent. I wonder if a student is not given access to four quarterly assessments and misses one or two is this recorded as a fail!

It is unacceptable that the entire syllabus is not provided for our students and they are not treated equal to every other student. Would this be tolerated on any other third level course? Is subjective marking fair in the absence of the full syllabus being delivered? Our students don't think so.

On behalf of our students we have written to UCD complaining of the practice of missing assessments as it is not and never can be fair. Keep up the good work students and don't be afraid to ask for help that's what we are here for. Best of luck.

(By the way why can't a student on the Post Grad course not repeat the year like every other student?)

## NASRA DEMANDS ACTION TO PROTECT PARAMEDICS FROM ASSAULT



MICK DIXON

Recently, towards the end of October two of our colleagues were subjected to a frightening experience during the course of a night shift duty. This incident took place in the South-East and once again violence impacts on the small family of us who perform our duties as pre-hospital emergency care practitioners.

On the night in question a routine call developed into what can only be described as a nightmare for these two clinicians. A man collapsed outside a premises in the city. On arrival both paramedics attended the patient as per their protocols and CPG's. The patient entered the ambulance and appeared grateful for the aid and assistance he was offered, and the crew proceeded to the hospital. However, as the ambulance was entering the grounds of the hospital the patient made unprovoked threatening remarks to the paramedic and then proceeded to allegedly assault him. Both practitioners activated the alarm system via the Tetra radio system. This incident became more vicious resulting

in both practitioners requiring medical assistance from the local emergency department.

At the time of writing I have made contact with both paramedics and am glad to report that both are doing reasonably well considering the nature of events on that dreadful night, and I am also aware that legal proceedings are being considered.

I refer to this incident because concerns that the systems in place to protect staff are at best minimalist as on the night in question this crew struggled with the individual involved for thirty five minutes before any assistance arrived.

At a time when increasing pressure is on paramedics in relation to response times and there is anecdotal evidence of management querying incidents where a crew is 8, 9 or 10 seconds late activating a mobile button, what, we might ask, about the response times for assisting a crew who are themselves in danger.

Earlier this year we learned through Freedom of Information that in 2016 Nearly 50 attacks took place on paramedics last year but none of the incidents resulted in a prosecution against the assailant. In response NASRA National Secretary, Tony Gregg made the point that despite claims by the NAS that it was no pursuing a 'no prosecution policy' the lack of convictions following assaults demonstrated a disregard for the safety of ambulance workers. "If convictions are secured against

people who assault paramedics it would be a clear demonstration that it will not be tolerated," he said.

Tony also made the very valid point that it was clear to paramedics that management in the ambulance service have not been adequately trained in how to pursue prosecutions over assaults. Yet we know that in many of these assault incidents often the psychological injury can take a lot longer to heal than the actual broken bone and in that regard people can carry the effects of assault for many years after the assault itself.

The staff of the NAS are the first point of contact for those unfortunate to require pre-hospital emergency care. And we need to have the assurances that at all times we are protected when carrying out these duties. NASRA will continue to highlight the realities of assaults on paramedics while keeping up our campaign for mandatory sentencing.

I would ask that anyone who has been affected by unacceptable behaviour not to hesitate in contacting Critical Incident Stress Management for guidance and assistance, and also bring their experience to the attention of your local NASRA representative. What may seem as only a cliché is never more true "stay safe and please be careful out there".

**NASRA NATIONAL CHAIRMAN,  
MICHAEL DIXON.**

## NOMINATION FOR THE POSTS OF NASRA NATIONAL CHAIR AND SECRETARY

NASRA has continued its growth in membership and we are now confident that the critical mass required to achieve recognition is within our sights. Seven years ago we came to you with an idea for NASRA, and asked that you support our campaign to independently represent ourselves by simply joining our union. Since then many of you have responded and remained true to the cause and because of your support we are now the second largest

trade union representing paramedics in the state. With the support of those who have yet to join us we will realise our ambition to be the largest trade union solely for the representation of ambulance paramedics.

The NASRA structure we set up provided for a union to have a Chairman and Secretary. Due to the commitment of our officer board and local representatives we are now inviting nominees for election to the Chair and Secretary positions. These positions going forward will be for a two year tenure when the posts will be again for election.

We are delighted to invite you to nominate a member from your area on the officer board for election to be submitted to head office by email to pgannon@pna.ie marked chair or secretary nomination. Nomination should be supported by the proposer. Closing date for receipt of nominations will be 23rd of Dec 17. Elections to take place in the first week of Feb 18.



## STORM OPHELIA RAISES ISSUES FOR PARAMEDIC SAFETY

In recent years staff have found themselves exposed to more inclement weather conditions like never before. Advances in weather forecasting have allowed Met Eireann, central government and local authorities to forecast weather more accurately and consequently to put plans in place to warn of impending dangers, promote safety and protect life and infrastructure.

The imminent arrival of the recent storm Ophelia was well forecast, and warnings began some days before hand, highlighting the likely impact of the storm and giving advice as to how to remain safe throughout its duration and after it had passed.

When one of our members was asked to travel a significant distance out of his hub to crew up with another lone worker on the morning of the storm. The paramedic suggested working on the RRV which was available to them at local level and thus negating the unnecessary travel however this suggestion was turned down by management.

With the above in mind, during the storm the HSE failed to follow their own emergency plan and through NEOC they called in voluntary organisations i.e. St Johns Ambulance, The Red Cross and the Order of Malta personnel to provide emergency cover. This is despite the fact that this should only happen when the NAS is beyond all capacity. This was not the case as of duty NAS personnel were not called in, or placed on stand-by.

This incident highlights a number of issues that all staff must be aware of when faced with a choice like this.

1. We, as national ambulance staff, work under the expectation of reasonable requests. But is it reasonable to expect the worker to put themselves in danger? No it is not. Is it reasonable to ask a paramedic to attend an AS1 call as part of their daily duties? Yes it is. Is it reasonable to ask a member of staff to take on an extra journey that is not necessary whilst there is a red weather warning in place throughout the country? No, it is not.

2. The National Ambulance Service/ Health Service Executive have a duty of care as an employer to provide a safe place of work as well and a responsibility to highlight unsafe workplaces or practices. The case of a nationwide red weather warning should not need to be highlighted to any employer.

3. It should also be noted that the many in the wider HSE workforce were either told not to attend for duty, or were sent home early to avoid being caught in the storm. These staff are also having these hours protected as noted in the memorandum sent out by the head of human resources Rosari Mannion (see excerpt from same below).

*In light of the recent disruption caused by storm Ophelia Health Service Employees who were unable to attend their place of work on Monday 16th October for safety reasons and those who were required to leave their work premises early will be paid for the hours which they were scheduled to work. Please note that those employees whose attendance at work was affected as a direct result of the unforeseen weather events are not required to take annual leave or any other form of paid leave in respect of the hours which they were unable to work.*

With this in mind we are frontline paramedics must be aware of our own responsibilities when being requested to attend for work in clearly hazardous situations. It is vital that while we continue to fulfil our roles on the frontline that we look after our own safety as well. We would hope that we have the support of our employer in ensuring that safety.



The NASRA Officer Board meeting in Sallins earlier this month



## BRENDAN FLYNN, A PARAMEDIC SUPERVISOR IN DAVITT ROAD IS TAKING UP A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN NASRA

Here he sets out his motivation for getting involved and his plans for future of NASRA.

Many of you will know me through my long association with the trade union movement having been an IARC member and local shop steward with SITPU. However, like so many of you, I have decided that with the ongoing deterioration in our terms and conditions, which is particularly acute for new members of staff, that a new direction is required. I firmly believe that it is time for ambulance service staff to represent ourselves. We have seen many changes in our service over the years with advanced paramedics, new equipment, paramedics carrying, and being responsible for the administration of drugs and medications.

In addition, we now work in an environment of increased accountability, scrutiny and surveillance of staff from the moment we come on duty. These changes have not been reflected in our pay, or appreciated by our senior management.

Ambulance staffs have found themselves working in an environment where their concerns are ignored and in some cases staff are afraid to raise legitimate basic concerns about their family situations and travel time to work for fear of worsening their situation. Staff feel they are working under constant fear of disciplinary action and afraid to complain for fear of reprisal if they make a mistake. We work under a control and dispatch system that makes no provision for mandatory breaks and that automatically upgrades calls resulting in crews being placed in greater danger. A system that increases the likelihood of mistakes or errors is heightened when crews are not getting structured breaks between calls.

Crews are regularly given calls that bring them beyond their finishing time. Many new staff are traveling excessive distances to work, and in some cases have to take accommodation far away from their families. Many front-line staff who are genuinely committed to their jobs are slowly being broken and ground down. This is unacceptable for frontline paramedics who are the interface of the NAS with the public and the health system.

Meanwhile, NASRA continues to grow and effectively represent its members.

Let me be clear, NASRA will demand a National Ambulance Service that is not statistic driven, but which values its staff and is committed to providing a world class service to the community. We continue to demand the recognition of ICO, paramedics, advance paramedics, and a redefining of roles reflected in the substantive grades within the HSE to include an appropriate career path.

What is needed are working conditions that reflect the changing roles and increased responsibility that staff are expected to carry out.

As a trade union for paramedics, NASRA also expects to play a responsible and equal role in defining the direction and evolution of the national ambulance service.

When NASRA was first established over six years ago, HSE management (and some in the wider trade union movement) said it would not last a year.

Now, as NASRA moves towards representing a majority of paramedics nationally I am determined that we can provide a stronger and more effective voice for paramedics than ever. I look forward to the challenge.

## BLOCKING PAYROLL DEDUCTIONS TO WEAKEN NASRA – IT WON'T WORK

Astonishingly, but not unexpectedly, in a move to dissuade paramedics from joining NASRA, the HSE instructed central payroll to cease the union deductions of any further NASRA member application forms. Interestingly – and no doubt by sheer coincidence – in the same week SIPTU corresponded to Rosario Mannion HR HSE that they would like to engage on the issue of a pay review for paramedics citing that it was deserved following significant improvements and up skilling by paramedics. Announcing that the issue could be dealt with along with the other servant groups i.e. porters and general staff.

As you will know we have overcome many obstacles in the past, including managers turning their backs on us literally while we were representing our members; managers attempting to silence us at meetings; HR preliminary arguments to the industrial courts that we had no right to represent because they claimed falsely that we were not a trade union and subsequently over ruled by the courts. There have been other obstacles too, such as having

notices ripped from wall, and members informative literature being binned, our leaders being threatened with disciplinary proceedings and having their wages docked, or even not being paid.

So, stopping our subscriptions is just another tactic to oppose and silence us as a trade union and I can assure you we have suffered more than this in the past. At the beginning they said we would not last a week and that we were just a couple of disgruntled paramedics. Then it was claimed that we wouldn't last six months and now obviously they have got the message loud and clear that NASRA are here to stay and our membership continues to grow.

Our full-time officials on behalf of our members have protested the blocking of payroll deductions to the HSE and discussions are currently underway to resolve the issue.

## NASRA FIGHTING FOR GRADE RECOGNITION AND THE CHANGES IT WOULD MEAN FOR RETIREMENT AGE

Recently two paramedics took the initiative to organise a meeting on the issue of the paramedic grade and revised pay due to an increase of the paramedic skill set and our standing as a professional group

We agree to both of the objectives above, and have researched and completed a lot of work on these issues. It is important to be aware that any grading of paramedics would be catastrophic for our members if that process did not include a reduction of the retirement age from 68 to 60 years of age, and allow for paramedics to be entitled to the conditions currently enjoyed by an Gardaí, DFB, Prison Officers, and Psychiatric Nurses which allows full pensionable entitlements after 30 years' service with the last ten of the thirty doubled.

In 1993 the facilitator Bob Clarke in his findings and recommendations following engagement between the HSE ambulance service and the then shop stewards found that the retirement age of ambulance staff should be revised downwards as the retirement age of 65 was unreasonable given the demands and expectations of their work.

The unions who represented us up to now probably don't even remember the Bob Clarke forum and also instead of reducing the retirement age downwards they have successfully managed to negotiate the retirement age upwards to 68 yrs- and it only took them 25 years to achieve it. Well done lads for the great representation.

Currently as we stand (on advice from pensions experts) to change from our present pension entitlement to a standard HSE grade would mean the following :  
(applicable to members who joined the service post 1995. Those pre 95 may be excluded from above impact)

1. no entitlement to old age pension euro 240
2. no entitlement to HSE supplementary pension euro 180
3. no entitlement to medical car
4. no entitlement to any social welfare allowance or assistance

Under the grading system you will retire on half your basic salary of €738 and one and a half times your gross salary as a lump sum.

Essentially you and your partner are on your own and given that the current expectation and demands of paramedics has increased it is unlikely that our members will reach full retirement entitlement at age 68 and following 40 years' service.

Only recently we assisted two of our members with retirement issues both between 55 yrs of age and 60 yrs of age. Neither had full pensionable entitlements and both retired on ill health with degenerative back injury due to their profession with less than 40 yrs service.

Acknowledging our professional grade and rewarding us for our progressive skills set should all be part of the same package they are intrinsically linked. It should also include our retirement age.

As far as reward for upskilling on its own merit we put forward to the public pay review group a submission which included a pay award for our improve skill set. No other union did this; in fact they deliberately omitted to do so. Strange how all of a sudden they have changed their tune and now have a new found interest since the obvious growth in NASRA membership. NASRA will continue to fight to achieve this change to our entitled pension, but we must represent ourselves. This is one issue we should not trust anyone else with.

## PLACES AVAILABLE FOR UNION REP TRAINING COURSES FEBRUARY 2018

NASRA has organised a Representative Training Course for existing reps and for those who may in the future like to become representatives.

The course will be run over two days and travel, meal and accommodation expenses will be covered by the union for each member taking part.

The Course will take place at the Hudson Bay Hotel on Thursday 8th and Friday 9th February 2018. You can book a place by contacting Paula Gannon at HQ 045-852300 pgannon@pna. ie There are 30 places available on a first come basis.

The course is devised by the PNA with the content geared to the specific needs of paramedics. The content will include information on union structures, roles and responsibilities of members and elected representatives, representative skills, HSE grievance and disciplinary procedures, HSE policy and procedures, including HSE Trust in Care Policy and communication and media skills. Some scenario sessions will also be included.

It is our ambition to train 25% of the membership up to representative level. We are particularly interested to hear from those who have just joined the service and who have little or no

representative experience but who want to be part of the NASRA's future. Unfortunately, none of us are getting any younger and so it is important that we young, dynamic NASRA members ready to step up to the place and provide professional held and support to fellow union members.

We would be particularly delighted if as many women as possible were to attend the courses so as to reflect the growing role of women in the service. If we are to promote change we need to ensure that as many women paramedics as possible become activists in order to bring their skills to the fore in NASRA .