

**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC,
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA TO OPEN THE 10TH ANNUAL
CONFERENCE OF THE COUNCIL OF AMBULANCE
AUTHORITIES, WREST POINT,
WEDNESDAY 3RD OCTOBER 2012.**

It is a great pleasure for me as Governor of Tasmania to welcome you all to Hobart for the 2012 Council of Ambulance Authorities 2012 annual conference. I think it is right that we have visitors here from all parts of Australia and New Zealand as well as a few from even further afield. Wherever you come from you are welcome in our beautiful island State.

It would appear that Hobart is particularly attractive to those in the medical and allied professions for recently there has been a positive outbreak of conferences. The Scientific Meeting of the General Surgeons Society of Australia was held here in Hobart a fortnight ago and immediately after it closed the 2012 international Symposium of the Australian and New Zealand Forensic Society opened their conference. Only last Saturday at the Hotel Grand Chancellor here in Hobart I had the privilege of opening the 71st National Congress of the Australian Society of Anaesthetists and today we see the start of your conference. We are very proud of the natural beauty of our State and always ready to show it off to as many visitors as we can so we welcome all these conferences.

Now I see that this year marks the 50th year of the foundation of the Council of Ambulance Authorities and of course at the half century mark it is timely for you to consider at this conference the

future of the Council under the theme '**Shaping the Future**'- **What will ambulance services in Australasia look like in 10-20 years from now?** On the basis that history always informs the present and the future I wondered what ambulance services in Australia looked like in the past. As I looked into this question I was surprised to learn that, leaving aside the transport of the wounded from the battlefield, today's civilian ambulance service is a relatively recent innovation.

In New South Wales the first recognised ambulance service, started up in 1895 on what you might think was not an auspicious day - 1st April. It was a community based organisation known as the Civil Ambulance and Transport Brigade. The first ambulance station in that State was a borrowed police station in Railway Square, Sydney and the two officers there transported patients on hand-held stretchers and hand-litters.¹ So you've come a long way in what is less than two life-times.

In Queensland the first ambulance service appeared at about the same time. It too was a voluntary organisation. According to the Queensland Ambulance web site,² Military medic Seymour Warrian formed the brigade following an event he witnessed at the Brisbane Show grounds during Show Week in 1892. A horse rider fell and broke his leg and bystanders walked the rider from the field, seriously worsening his injury. The first ambulance station in

¹ <http://www.ambulance.nsw.gov.au/about-us/History.html> accessed 21st September 2012

² <http://www.ambulance.qld.gov.au/about/default.asp> accessed 22nd September 2012

Queensland operated out of the Brisbane Newspaper Company and officers on night duty slept on rolls of newspaper on the floor. They had a stretcher, but no vehicle and transported patients on foot.

In other States the beginnings were similar. In Victoria the first ambulance Service appeared in 1887 when sufficient funds were raised by St John Association to purchase six Ashford Litters or St John Ambulances as they were sometimes known, which were strategically placed at police stations. For those of you who like me, don't know what an Ashford Litter is I can tell you that it is a wooden cart with 2 large wheels with elliptical springs, and four legs to support the litter when parked, which folded up to form handles for pushing the litter long. I think that I last saw one on the television being used during the Tiananmen Square massacre!! However Victoria was quick to modernize and within a decade a horse drawn ambulance was operating from behind the Windsor Hotel in Burke Street.³

The situation was the same in other countries. In the United Kingdom and America there was no civilian ambulance service until the beginning of the 20th Century. Before then it was left to the police, firefighters and even taxi-drivers to staff a fleet of Ashford Litters to take patients to the nearest hospital or doctor's surgery.⁴

³ <http://www.ambulance.vic.gov.au/About-Us/History.html> accessed 22nd November 2012

⁴ http://www.londonambulance.nhs.uk/about_us/who_we_are/our_story/a_brief_history.aspx accessed 22nd September 2012.

So, over a period of a little more than 100 years the civilian ambulance has developed from fleets of carts pushed by hand, into large fleets of sophisticated motor vehicles and airplanes. Reflecting on this development when pondering the question “What will ambulance services in Australasia look like in 10-20 years from now?” I would suggest that the biggest development over the last 100 years is not so much the internal combustion engine, but the fact that the ambulance has changed from being merely a means of transporting a patient to a hospital or doctor into the place where the sick and injured receive their first and often critical treatment. The drivers of the Ashford litters have morphed from muscular labourers into highly qualified paramedics, many of whom learnt their skills in University degree courses. I see that that proposition is reflected in a press release by the Council when reporting that last year in Australia ambulance services took nearly 6 million people to hospital in 2011, more than 85% were resuscitation or emergency cases or urgent or semi urgent cases.

But turning to the question of the future, the press release went on to say:

“Ambulance Services play a critical role in Australia’s health system and there is a lot more to their role than the transporting of patients to hospital with lights and sirens ...” The statement continued, “Ambulance services are also involved in caring for people in the community,

treating them at home or 'on site' and there is a world-wide trend towards an increasing focus on this aspect of ambulance work, while retaining the vital emergency component."

Having looked at your conference programme I am sure that there will be some interesting discussion about this development for the ambulance services over the next few decades.

On two occasions I have been taken to hospital in an ambulance, my wife was taken there by ambulance once and her mother on several occasions. On every one of those occasions the attending paramedics were quietly competent, calm, supportive, encouraging and optimistic. Of course I know nothing about how ambulance services are likely to shape up in the 10 - 20 years, but as you consider that question at this conference I urge you never to lose sight of the importance of the attributes of those paramedics who attended me and some members of my family.

I have much pleasure in declaring your conference open and as I do I wish you well in your discussions and deliberations over today and tomorrow and I look forward to talking to some of you at Government House this evening.