

UNISON

South Western Ambulance Branch Update

THE GRAPEVINE

www.swamb.com


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UNISON WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS

The South Western Ambulance Branch of UNISON has continued to welcome on board new members over the past year.

UNISON is now the only formally recognised union within the South



Western Ambulance Service (SWAST), and look forward to welcoming more members in the coming months in order to improve our position of strength. Our branch now has over 1,700 members.

Welcome to this latest edition of The Grapevine—the newsletter aimed at all staff in the South Western Ambulance Service. It is brought to you by your colleagues in your branch of UNISON, to keep you up to date with just a small sample of what is currently going on within the branch.

What this little publication does not try to do is “compete” with management's weekly BULLETIN.

The difference is this — the Bulletin does a very good job at letting you know what's happening within the trust, whilst The Grapevine is here to let you in on a little of how it happens, from the union point of view: the representations that are made on your behalf by Union officials; the work with management in the formulation of policies and structures; the deciding of terms and conditions; the negotiation of pay.

As a member of UNISON, you benefit from the help and support of your colleagues right here in the South Western Ambulance Service, backed by the overall strength of

“UNISON is now the only formally recognised union within the South Western Ambulance Service.”

Britain's biggest trade union, with more than 1.3 million members.

Right now, with the merger of the two trusts continuing to create insecurity and uncertainty for some, and with issues of changes to meal break arrangements and pay structures being debated, you can rest assured that much work is being done by UNISON on your behalf. - R Fox

KEEP THE NHS WORKING

UNISON

Fleet Issues—The new Mercedes, a rock and a hard place

The new fleet of Mercedes vehicles introduced to the Dorset area of the trust have been met with a mixed response from those who have worked on them in the months since they have been on the road. Many staff like the spacious, well-designed interiors and easy handling (despite the large size).

The biggest cause of complaint among UNISON members has been around the rear of the vehicle. Other trusts opted for a tail lift in this position, but the vehicle which arrived in Dorset

“...the new fleet replacement programme should not include vehicles which pose obvious threats to the health and wellbeing of staff”.

turned up with a drop-down ramp fitted. Some have complained that ramp can be heavy and awkward to operate. In more recent spells of wet weather, however, a more serious problem came to light. The surfaces of the ramp seemed to become slippery in the wet, and many incident reports were submitted as staff suffered slips on the ramp. More recently,

concerns raised by UNISON reps, coupled with the number and nature of incident reports, led to the vehicles being withdrawn from service for remedial action. In one of the most recent incidents at the time of going to print, a UNISON member reported a slip on the ramp and resulting in a serious back injury.

Worryingly, there were reports that staff were reluctant to report accidents and/or support the withdrawal of the vehicles from service due to the fear of working on something arguably worse—a “spare” vehicle. The back-up fleet of vehicles often means working on a vehicle which requires trolley-beds that must be lifted and loaded manually, and steps up which patients must be carried on carry-chairs, raising an equal number of fears for the health and safety of staff.

UNISON feels that the phasing out of the last of these vehicles from service is now overdue, and that the new fleet replacement programme should not include vehicles which pose obvious threats to the health and wellbeing of staff. UNISON will continue to campaign for the situation to improve.

Meal break consultation gets underway

Consultation papers have been posted to all members of the South Western Ambulance Branch of UNISON, and elsewhere nationally, to ask for opinions on the issue of meal breaks. As you are probably well aware, the meal break debate has continued to rage on since the introduction of meal breaks outside of the working day, brought about by the full implementation of the Agenda For Change working conditions. (see “The meal break Issue” at www.swamb.com for more detail). It was left up to local arrangements to try and come up with a solution.

Now a whole range of various ways of working are in place across ambulance services in the UK, and hardly any of them are without problems, some of which have even made the national press in recent months. In the end, it has been shown that ambulance Services have been unable to apply exclusive break arrangements without compromising patient care.

The National Ambulance Sector of UNISON has been working to collate the different methods being applied across the country, and to come up with a recommended solution for all trusts in England and Wales. This is why all UNISON members have been asked their opinion.

The information provided by UNISON accompanying the consultation paper outlines a suggested return to inclusive meal breaks, on the basis of section 10.1 of agenda for change conditions, which allow for meal breaks to be included in the working day as an exception where emergency cover is required.

UNISON is recommending that shifts should preferably be taken at base station, with a first meal break of 45 minutes duration and a second break of 30 minutes for a shift of 10-12 hours duration, and believes an appropriate time for implementation would be no later than 1st October 2007. The National Ambulance Sector believes that this change can be accurately costed that any additional costs should be met by the Department Of Health.

IF YOU HAVE NOT RECEIVED A BALLOT PAPER CONTACT richard@pound.eclispe.co.uk

THE DORSET INTERIM MEALBREAK ARRANGEMENTS

THE “WESTCOUNTRY” INTERIM MEAL BREAK AGREEMENT

THE LONDON AMBULANCE SERVICE MEAL BREAK ARRANGEMENT

All now viewable on The Grapevine Online at: www.swamb.com

THE FUTURE OF THE TECHNICIAN

As the talk about “Emergency Care Assistants” turn into the reality of job advertisements, many UNISON members are worried about their future roles.

As outlined well in recent staff bulletins, the South Western Ambulance Service Trust is proudly announcing it is to be the first to introduce the new grade of operational ambulance staff—Emergency Care Assistant (ECA).

The ECA grade is part of a nationally recommended package of changes. Here in the South West, we appear to be very much first off the starting block— although there are some trusts that have already introduced similar schemes on a cheap, ad-hoc basis, there are staff at “ground level” in many other trusts who remain completely unaware of the arrival of this new grade.

It is difficult not to suspect that in the long term this is nothing but a cost-cutting exercise, and there are fears that the ECA skill level is being specifically structured in order to align the role to a low band on the Agenda for change pay scale.

This branch strongly objects to the role of technician being reduced to the role of ECA at the cost of patient care, and feels that the clinical skills and knowledge of an ECA should not fall below that of a current (AFC) band 4 practitioner.

We wish to support better opportunities (with pay to match) for ACA’s to progress to, and we want to ensure that our Paramedics are well supported by clinically qualified staff. Most importantly, we do not want to see the quality of patient care offered as a crew reduced.

The other priority is making sure that there is protection for the pay and conditions of current technicians who, for whatever reason, do not progress to Paramedic level.

MEMBERS CONCERNS LEAD TO IMPROVED LOCAL CONSULTATION

A meeting called by UNISON members at Poole Ambulance Station in January led to the setting up of a new pathway for consultation over localised issues.

Members at the station called for the meeting to discuss concerns they had with a number of topics, such as the safety and condition of old vehicles, meal breaks, agenda for change and owed hours.

UNISON branch secretary Ian Hopkins attended the meeting, along with assistant branch secretary Dave Hunt. The branch were pleased that Chief Executive Ken Wenman was also very much involved in the discussions.

The outcome of the meeting was the establishment of a new “Locality Consultative Committee” (LCC), which will meet regularly and consists of UNISON representatives and Operational Locality Managers (OLMs).

The aim will be better communication and liaison at a local level, encouraging closer working and better morale, with staff representatives passing on concerns of their colleagues.

At time of going to print, the first of these meetings is yet to be arranged.

Visit www.swamb.com to keep updated on this issue.

NEWS IN BRIEF

CORNWALL: OUT OF HOURS

S.W.A.S.T. is continuing to work towards taking over the running of the out of hours Doctors Service in Cornwall, which is currently in the private sector. This move is welcomed by UNISON as a move which will encourage more jobs in the NHS and closer working between our members and colleagues.

DORCHESTER: DORSET SECTOR MEETING MOVES WEST

The March 6th meeting of members in Dorset was planned to be held in Dorchester (as opposed to the usual meeting place near Poole), in order to welcome members from the T&G union, encourage more involvement from staff in the west of the county and offer opportunities for them to get more involved in local UNISON issues.

TAUNTON: UNISON BRANCH EXECUTIVE AGM

The Annual General Meeting of the UNISON Branch Executive meeting was held in Taunton on February 28th.

Details of items discussed, and minutes of previous meetings, can be viewed at: www.swamb.com

UNISON BRANCH EDUCATION – FULL GUIDE AVAILABLE

A full guide to all courses currently available on UNISON is now available to all members of our UNISON branch.

These courses represent a good opportunity for members. Courses range from basic Union stewards training to Health and Safety, and are held at a variety of locations across the South West.

Whether you are a UNISON member looking to become more involved, or an established steward or representative, looking to gain extra skills and knowledge,

the programme of courses on offer may well be of use to you.

Such courses will be of value both in your chosen role within UNISON, as well as your job and your personal development.

The guide can be downloaded and printed from The Grapevine Online. The address (in the unlikely event that you missed it) is www.swamb.com. If you have any questions about education opportunities available through UNISON, you can contact Rob Angear, our Branch Education Officer.

The rising cost of professional status

The Health Professions council has been proposing change it's fees again (The last rise was in 2003). This time has issued a consultation paper outlining two possible options for the increases. Renewal fees are currently £60.00 per year. The proposals introduce a more complicated approach—with different fee levels for new registrants and those renewing their membership.

In addition they propose that the "scrutiny fees" they charge for processing international and grand parenting routes should increase. UNISON has been very active in consulting its members on this issue, and we have now informed the HPC of our strong objections to any further rise in fees.

Technician review continues

The review process for former Westcountry Technicians continues. The process was stalled when our technicians met with the job analysts to go through changes in the Job Analysis Questionnaires (JAQ) that they had submitted. It is now hoped that by the end of March we should finally see the right outcome for Technicians.

Ian Hopkins, Branch Secretary, expressed the branch's gratitude to the UNISON stewards and Technician members who have taken considerable time and effort in producing JAQ's and meeting the analysts, in order to do the best they can for hundreds of other technicians across the former Westcountry area.

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Q&A

Do you have any questions concerning your rights, job or your UNISON branch?

Want to ask what UNISON are doing about something that concerns you? Wondering about your rights on an issue? Want to know about your membership?

Just email your question to us via: russfox999@hotmail.co.uk

We will try to answer you and publish the best questions right here in *The Grapevine*.

Ambulance representatives wanted across the South West

Views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the editor. Nor do they necessarily reflect official UNISON policy or opinion.

SOUTH WESTERN AMBULANCE BRANCH

If you are a UNISON member, why not consider becoming a steward and representing your colleagues? You will be given full training and support, and you can enhance your personal development through new skills and qualifications, whilst knowing that you can help support others.

We currently need people from all backgrounds and of all ages right now, so if think you might be interested, then please get in touch with your nearest steward, or your sector or branch secretary. You could make a real difference.