



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive



National Ambulance Service (NAS)
National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) Procedure
Dealing with Aggressive, Offensive or Abusive Phone Calls

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| Document reference number | <i>NASCC012</i> | Document developed by | National Ambulance Service |
| Revision number | 6 | Document approved by | NAS Leadership Team |
| Approval date | 14th December 2012 | Responsibility for implementation | Each NEOC Manager |
| Revision date | 14th December 2019 | Responsibility for review and audit | Control and Performance Manager |

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POLICY

- 1.1 NAS staff should not have to accept calls where the caller is being abusive. However, there is often a perception by some members of the public that they can openly abuse staff working in the public sector.
- 1.2 It may be the case for some individuals that abusive terminology may form part of their everyday vocabulary. There may also be cases where due to extreme levels of stress, an individual might resort to the use of expletives. However, staff have the right to be spoken to in a courteous manner. This script is therefore for the use of staff when they encounter callers who use abusive language in an offensive way and who will not desist from being abusive.
- 1.3 It is important for future reference that activation of the script is read exactly as the words are written below in case a legal challenge or complaint is received.
- 1.4 Using the script as written will ensure that staff are fully protected against any suggestion of wrong doing, as long as the caller is abusive.
- 1.5 It is essential that all abusive calls are reported to a NEOC Manager and that an Incident/Near Miss Report form is completed. A file note of the occurrence should also be made.

2.0 PURPOSE

- 2.1 To support the implementation of Policy – NASWS020 – Managing Violence and Aggression towards Staff

3.0 SCOPE

- 3.1 This Procedure covers all phone calls answered by all NAS staff, supervisors and managers, but in particular, NEOC Supervisors and Staff.
- 3.2 This Procedure does not apply to those calls where ProQA (AMPDS) protocols apply and include specific instructions to diffuse abusive situations.
- 3.3 This Procedure does not apply to those calls, where a caller is a person who does not have the **capacity** to understand instructions, but who may need help. The assistance of the patient's GP, family or Mental Health Team may be useful. The assistance of the Gardai may be required if it is felt that the patient is a danger to themselves or others.

Note of Caution:

- 3.4 It is accepted that no member of staff is expected to have to deal with abusive callers.
- 3.5 It should also be remembered, the role we play in the healthcare chain. We are frequently the first port of call for patients who may not have full capacity of thought. It is very important that the rights of the employee are respected, but equally, it is in everyone's best interests, that for example a patient with an exacerbation of a mental health condition who is not thinking or behaving rationally is not denied access to care.
- 3.6 However, it must be remembered that some of our callers may be stressed, have a mental health problem or be under the influence of a substance. If you are not successful in calming the caller; often the simplest step is to pass them to another staff member, who just might connect with them.
- 3.7 Follow this Procedure for all callers; however, the challenge is to distinguish between callers that have the **capacity** to understand your instructions and those that do not. In other words, reading out the script to someone who does not seem to comprehend it, is not a solution to the problem.
- 3.8 You must pass the call to the most senior person or Supervisor available, who will either be able to communicate with the caller or will corroborate your concerns and who can then initiate the 3 warnings.
- 3.9 The Gardai and/or Mental Health Teams (patient with known mental problems) must be notified immediately, if a call is terminated, and details provided as to identity/location, etc.

4.0 LEGISLATION/OTHER RELATED POLICIES

- A. Policy – NASWS020 – Managing Violence and Aggression towards Staff
- B. National Ambulance Service Parent Safety Statement
- C. Section 10, Non-Fatal Offences against the Person Act, 1997
- D. Section 13, Post Office Amendment Act 1951

5.0 GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

- 5.1 **NAS** considers that verbal abuse may consist of some or all of the following: shouting, name-calling, the use of insulting, intimidating, threatening, aggressive, shaming, demeaning, offensive, hostile, derogatory, pejorative, racist, discriminatory, sectarian or profane language which is likely to cause the receiver distress, alarm, harassment, fear and apprehension which seriously affects his or her right to dignity in the workplace or his or her feeling of wellbeing, safety, health, welfare or security.

6.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- 6.1 The responsibility for ensuring compliance with this Procedure within NEOC lies with each respective NEOC Supervisor and Staff member.
- 6.2 The responsibility for ensuring compliance with this Procedure within the NAS generally lies with each respective member of staff.

7.0 PROCEDURES

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 7.1.1 On receipt of a call that you find abusive, you must remind the caller that the call is being recorded and that you find the terms they are using offensive and therefore they should desist from using that type of language. If the caller fails to respond to this request, then they must be told that unless they stop being offensive, that the call will be terminated. If no improvement is forthcoming, then the caller must be told immediately that they have not heeded the warning and that you are terminating the call. At this point you must disconnect immediately.
- 7.1.2 The wording to be used is as follows:

FIRST WARNING

- 7.2.1 This call is being recorded for safety purposes. I find the language that you are using to be abusive. Please do not use abusive language as this can be interpreted as harassment and is an offence under Section 10 of the Non-fatal Offences against the Person Act, 1997. If you continue to use that language, we will suspend the call until you stop.

SECOND WARNING

- 7.3.1 May I remind you that this call is being recorded. If you continue to behave in this manner, I will have to suspend the call.

THIRD WARNING

- 7.4.1 I have now asked you twice to stop using abusive language and you have carried on. **The National Ambulance Service provides assistance to those in need of emergency care or transport.** I am now going to leave you for up to one minute to allow you to reflect on your behaviour.

TERMINATION

- 7.5.1 I have now asked you three times to stop using abusive language and you have carried on. **The National Ambulance Service provides assistance to those in need of emergency care or transport.** If you need further help, please call us again. This matter will be reported to An Garda Síochána. I am now going to replace the receiver.

STAFF SUPPORT

- 7.6.1 Such calls must be reported immediately to the appropriate Line Supervisor/Manager, where available, who will ensure appropriate support is available if needed both during and after the call.
- 7.6.2 An Incident/Near Miss Report Form should be completed and submitted to the immediate Line Supervisor/Line Manager as appropriate.

8.0 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

- 8.1 This Procedure will be circulated electronically to all Managers, all Supervisors and Staff
- 8.2 This Procedure will be available in electronic format in each Ambulance Station and NEOC for ease of retrieval and reference
- 8.3 Each Operational Support and Resilience Manager will ensure that the Manager/Supervisor responsible for updating Policies and Procedures will return the Confirmation Form to NAS Headquarters to confirm document circulation to all staff

9.0 Revision History:

(This captures any changes that are made to a SOP when it has been revised. This may be placed at the back or close to the front of the document according to local preference.)

| No | Revision No | Date | Section Amended | Approved by |
|----|-------------|----------|---|-----------------|
| 1 | 6 | 03/01/17 | Amendments made to do with changes within NAS | NEOC Management |
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10.0 Appendices


- I. Procedure Script
- II. Acknowledgement Forms

11.0 Signatures of Approval



National Control Operations Manager
On Behalf of the National Ambulance Service

Date: 3rd January 2017



National Ambulance Service Director
On Behalf of the National Ambulance Service

Date 3rd January 2017

APPENDIX I

Dealing with Aggressive, Offensive or Abusive Phone Calls

Script (Read exactly!)

First Warning

“This call is being recorded for safety purposes. I find the language that you are using to be abusive. Please do not use abusive language as this can be interpreted as harassment and is an offence under Section 10 of the Non-fatal Offences against the Person Act, 1997. If you continue to use that language, we will suspend the call until you stop”.

Second Warning

“May I remind you that this call is being recorded. If you continue to behave in this manner, I will have to suspend the call”.

Third Warning

“I have now asked you twice to stop using offensive language and you have carried on. The National Ambulance Service provides assistance to those in need of emergency care or transport. I am now going to leave you for up to one minute to allow you to reflect on your behaviour.”

Termination

“I have now asked you three times to stop using abusive language and you have carried on. The National Ambulance Service provides assistance to those in need of emergency care or transport. If you need further help, please call us again. This matter will be reported to An Garda Síochána. I am now going to replace the receiver.”

Appendix II

Document Control No. 1 (to be attached to Master Copy)

NASCC012 NEOC Procedure Dealing with Aggressive, Offensive or Abusive Phone Calls

Reviewer: The purpose of this statement is to ensure that a Policy, Procedure, Protocol or Guideline (PPPG) proposed for implementation in the HSE is circulated to a peer reviewer (internal or external), in advance of approval of the PPPG. You are asked to sign this form to confirm to the committee developing this Policy or Procedure or Protocol or Guideline that you have reviewed and agreed the content and recommend the approval of the following Policy, Procedure, Protocol or Guideline:

Title of Policy, Procedure, Protocol or Guideline:

NASCC012 NEOC Procedure Dealing with Aggressive, Offensive or Abusive Phone Calls

I acknowledge the following:

- I have been provided with a copy of the Policy, Procedure, Protocol or Guideline described above.
- I have read Policy, Procedure, Protocol or Guideline document.
- I agree with the Policy, Procedure, Protocol or Guideline and recommend its approval by the committee developing the PPPG.

Name

Signature (Block Capitals)

Date

Please return this completed form to:

Name: Niamh Murphy
Contact Details: Corporate Office
National Ambulance Service
Rivers Building
Tallaght Cross
Dublin 24
email niamhf.murphy1@hse.ie

Document Control No. 2 (to be attached to Master Copy)

**Key Stakeholders Review of Policy, Procedure, Protocol or
Guidance Reviewer Statement**

Reviewer: The purpose of this statement is to ensure that a Policy, Procedure, Protocol or Guideline (PPPG) proposed for implementation in the HSE is circulated to Managers of Employees who have a stake in the PPPG, in advance of approval of the PPPG. You are asked to sign this form to confirm to the committee developing this Policy or Procedure or Protocol or Guideline that you have seen and agree to the following Policy, Procedure, Protocol or Guideline:

Title of Policy, Procedure, Protocol or Guideline:

**NASCC012 NEOC Procedure Dealing with Aggressive, Offensive or Abusive
Phone Calls**

I acknowledge the following:

- I have been provided with a copy of the Policy, Procedure, Protocol or Guideline described above.
- I have read Policy, Procedure, Protocol or Guideline document.
- I agree with the Policy, Procedure, Protocol or Guideline and recommend its approval by the committee developing the PPPG.

Name

Signature (Block Capitals)

Date

Please return this completed form to:

Name: Niamh Murphy
Contact Details: Corporate Office
National Ambulance Service
Rivers Building
Tallaght Cross
Dublin 24
email niamhf.murphy1@hse.ie

Document Control No. 3 Signature Sheet:
(to be attached to Master Copy)

Policy, Procedure, Protocol or Guideline:

**NASCC012 NEOC Procedure Dealing with Aggressive, Offensive or Abusive
Phone Calls**

*I have read, understand and agree to adhere to the attached Policy, Procedure,
Protocol or Guideline:*

| Print Name | Signature | Area of Work | Date |
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