

**SHA04002**

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**TITLE:** Mental health assessments in paramedic practice: Case analysis of the constructs of knowledge and judgement.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The provision of appropriate mental health services for Australians is an urgent national health priority. The introduction of new mental health legislation in Queensland precipitated widespread industrial concern within the Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) regarding the ability of paramedics to comply with explicit legislative requirements resulting from poor education and training in mental illness and assessment techniques. The related nursing and medical literature reports that recognition and assessment of mental illness is significantly problematic, citing poor knowledge and judgment constructs of mental illness and mental health assessments. Using a case study approach applying ethnographic and ethnomethodological research methods, the study will examine paramedic accounts and constructs of judgment and decision-making (JDM) of mental health and illness and mental health assessment practices. In particular, how official accounts of JDM are mandated in legislation, policies and practice guidelines, and how JDM actually occurs in the field will be examined. Particular emphasis will be placed on understanding on how paramedics come to make, arrive at and account for their judgments, the quality and nature of paramedic JDM, and the influence of context and ecology of the paramedic setting on JDM. Preliminary findings will be presented at the conference. By investigating the policy-practice interface, the study aims to improve the quality of care provided to individuals suffering from a mental illness by improving pre-hospital recognition and management of conditions, and the preparedness of paramedics to do so.