

Deadly delay outrage

Ambulance slow to respond, grieving sister wants answers



By LOUISE THROWER

BERYL Harrington could accept her brother's death better if she knew everything possible was done to save his life.

But with an ambulance reportedly taking 25 to 35 minutes to reach Robert Gregory, gripped by heart attack by the side of Taralga Rd, she's having difficulty.

For the 57-year-old (pictured), who she described as a private man, it would have been a "terrifying" way to die.

She has nothing but praise for the passersby first on the scene and indeed the ambulance officers who eventually treated him.

But she's critical of a system that allows up to a 35-minute delay for a clear emergency.

"I want someone to explain why a person having a heart attack doesn't take precedence," she said.

"As my husband said, he would have stood a better chance if someone had driven him to hospital, but people don't assume an ambulance is going to take that long."

Mrs Harrington said she has many questions that the ambulance service has so far failed to answer.

She voiced her concerns after reading the *Goulburn Post's* account last week of an elderly man who waited 40 minutes for an ambulance from Crookwell after tripping in Auburn St.

Mr Gregory was driving from Taralga, where he had been working and staying, on Monday, October 1, the holiday weekend.

At about 4pm he pulled over suddenly some 5km from the city's outskirts and fell to the ground clutching his chest, police said.

He told a woman, a hospital worker, who pulled over behind him minutes later that he was having a heart attack. She called an ambulance and received instructions from the operator, according to witnesses.

Mr Gregory was conscious but clearly in distress when nearby neighbour Jim McClelland arrived on the scene soon after. By this stage several cars had pulled up and some 10 people were trying to help directly or control traffic.

"No one knew CPR – it was a terrible thing," he said.

He went back to his house to get help from his daughter's friend but on their return some 10 minutes later found another passerby, Erin Corby, doing CPR.

He believed this was 20 minutes after the ambulance had been called.

Mrs Corby, her husband Garry and their children were travelling from Goulburn to feed animals on their Taralga Rd property at the time. She estimated her arrival at 10 to 12 minutes after the woman had stopped.

"A short time later I heard (the first woman) ask whether the ambulance had been dispatched and she was told it would be there in two to three minutes," Mrs Corby said.

"At another point the operator asked whether the ambulance had arrived and (the woman) said 'no'."

Mr Corby also rang for an ambulance at 4.17pm and was on the phone for three minutes, according to his mobile log. He wanted to ensure that one was on the way and hung up when he heard sirens.

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UNANSWERED QUESTIONS: Beryl Harrington clings to the few personal belongings of her brother Robert Gregory, who died of a heart attack last week after waiting up to 35 minutes for an ambulance on Taralga Rd. She is seeking answers about the ambulance delay.

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