

Mental health crisis in Scotland's ambulance service

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Increasing numbers of Scottish Ambulance Service staff are being signed off with anxiety, stress and depression, it has emerged.

Research by the Scottish Conservatives has revealed that hundreds of workers are absent with mental health issues every year.

The incidence is on the rise, with 404 off in 2016/17, 455 the year later, then 520 in 2018/19.

And for the first seven months of 2019/20, there were 379 staff signed off with those issues.

If that trend continues for the whole of this year, 648 will have been signed off, another new record.

Bosses at the organisation are increasingly concerned about the impact of mental health issues on the ambulance service.

In September, they noted at a board meeting: "Absence cases for stress/anxiety/mental health related conditions have increased, resulting in long term absence causes which continue to require significant attention."

The Scottish Conservatives said the SNP government had to do more to ensure ambulance staff had better working conditions and more resources to help those who were struggling.

Paramedics are under increasing pressure, with turnaround times at hospitals increasing and frequent verbal and physical assaults while they're out on emergency calls.

Scottish Conservative mental health spokeswoman Annie Wells said:

"Ambulance staff do a great job looking after us when we need them.

"It's clearly time for that favour to be returned, because it's in no-one's interests for increasing numbers of Scottish Ambulance Service workers to be off with these very serious problems.

"This is where the SNP government has to step in and ensure not only that the organisation has enough resources to make the job bearable, but also to provide support for those who need it.

"These statistics show there is a worsening problem within the ambulance service, and it cannot be allowed to continue.

“It is one of the most important professions around, and we can’t afford for hundreds of those individuals to be suffering in this way.”