

## SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AMBULANCE SERVICE

Consider this. Your business covers an area of almost one million kilometres. Your next customer will appear without notice, anywhere in that area, on average **every four minutes**. Your staff will need to reach that customer as a matter of urgency to personally administer expert paramedical care, often to avoid a life-threatening situation. Your business is a commercial operation, not underwritten by Government and you must recover the cost of servicing your customers. You employ 650 trained men and women and 1450 volunteers.

Such are the challenges facing SA Ambulance Service.

Its not surprising then, that in talking about the Service's Strategic Plan, Chief Executive Ian Pickering says, "We have embraced the concept of total quality Management as the guiding principle in implementing our plan.

Clearly, in a people business like SAAS, Human Resources Management is a key element of total quality management and the functionality and user friendly nature of Human Resources software plays a critical role within HR generally.

The history of Human Resources Information Systems within SAAS is one of change with CHRIS (Complete Human Resources Information Systems) by Frontier Software Pty Ltd being compulsorily replaced by a Government mandated system in 1996 which was in turn replaced by CHRIS (with Government approval) in 1998.

We asked Bill Monks, Corporate Services Director, to give us some background into the reasons for the change back to CHRIS. "Our customers are patients who expect our focus to be on front line service and our job as Managers is to support that front line.

In essence we found that CHRIS provided us with better tools to enable us to do the job and in particular it allowed a better fit to our flat organisation structure which demands team based, empowered people at the point of service."

Bill continued, "This empowerment is enhanced through CHRIS via its employee kiosk which uses the Company Intranet to allow our frontline people to communicate on-line, throughout our geographically dispersed organisation. Issues such as workers compensation, recruitment and payroll can be accessed in this way. Importantly, it interfaces with our CSIRO developed Rostering System which we see as enabling us to achieve the next quantum step in service delivery."

Bill added, "In summary, CHRIS and the introduction of the kiosk has helped us move towards **State of the Art HR Management** which centres upon Rostering and HR Management as one – strategically it goes back to the culture of the organisation. Under the previous system this would not have been possible."

HR Manager, Chris Ramage talks further about the need to change, “Our biggest concern, once we moved away from CHRIS was the lack of reporting capability. With the CHRIS Ad Hoc Report Writer we knew that whatever we put into the system we could get out, at any time and at no additional cost.”

He continued, “HR is all about information - Information is critical in the way it is disseminated throughout the organisation and gives us a strategic advantage by assisting us to run the business. Under CHRIS, various levels of management had become accustomed to seeking and receiving information.

Departments such as Emergency Operations, Human Resources and Finance regularly called for reports from CHRIS on a random basis. The replaced system was simply unable to do this.

The flexibility of the Report Writer was also welcome through the use of desktop tools which allowed staff to drop a report out of the database and then manipulate it in Excel. Such is the demand for management information that some 20 reports are produced with each payrun.”

The day to day operation of CHRIS is the responsibility of Peter Marantos, SAAS Payroll Manager. Peter has spent the best part of 25 years involved in all manner of Payroll software.

He says, “It was refreshing to get back to CHRIS because we didn’t have to keep throwing thousands of dollars at the implementation of upgrades. We didn’t have to test the upgrades which we welcomed because we are not in the business of developing IT; nor did it require a project team for implementation. It is as simple as loading a CD Rom and away we go. Frontier Software invests heavily in Research and Development and we derive the benefit through upgrades which have been properly tested before implementation.”

Finally we asked Bill Monks about the steps involved in obtaining approval to return to CHRIS. “Obviously we needed to put together a submission to win approval for the change. This required a formal, well researched business case listing the benefits of CHRIS to all levels of the organisation from an employee perspective through to the Pay Office, HR and various streams of management which relied on the system for reports and employee information. In addition to this we were able to show a material reduction in costs based on a five-year plan. It was a comprehensive and strong argument which finally received Government approval.”

SAAS along with other Australian ambulance services measures response times for all emergency attendances and only the ACT is able to respond to calls quicker than SAAS. When one considers the almost one million square kilometres of area to be covered, this record of achievement is clearly outstanding. Among many other factors, there sits CHRIS Payroll and HR Software providing management with the tools to reach that success.