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Critical Incident Stress, Post-Shooting Trauma And Law Enforcement Personnel

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I. Introduction

“Tuebor”- Latin word meaning, “I will defend.” A secondary meaning is to “serve and to protect.”

This is a basic belief of all police officers. This commitment to the community both sounds very noble, and is very noble. But we must also remember that police work also includes a “dark side”.

Officers see the human misery in society, the underbelly of the inhumanity people do to each other and to children; the pain and suffering citizens experience as a result of traffic accidents, domestic violence, assaults, robberies, murders and sudden death or injury. They also may become the “targets”, personally, of citizen anger, resentment and sometimes violence. A belief develops that there are few people out there you can often rely on for understanding, other than your fellow officers and family. But we don’t always tell that much to our significant others or kids.

To function on the streets, officers have to develop “emotional calluses” in order to separate their own personal reactions, from the daily parade of pain to which they bear witness. Otherwise, they can become overcome with the anguish, sorrow and hurt they must manage and resolve daily, as they serve their communities

To achieve this sense of personal well- being and emotional survival, officers need to understand the impact that police critical incidents can have on us.

The POAM Lifeline Program was developed in part, for officers, dispatchers, EMTs, law enforcement and corrections personnel to be “backup” for personnel after shootings, mass casualty incidents, and other line of duty critical incidents.

Critical Incidents may be defined as:

1. Any situation where a person feels overwhelmed by his sense of vulnerability and/or lack of control over the situation. (Roger Solomon, Ph.D.)
2. Any situation faced by law enforcement /emergency service personnel that causes them to experience unusually strong emotional reactions which have the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at the scene or later. (Jeff Mitchell, Ph.D.)
3. Any situation where one feels overwhelmed by forces beyond their control.
(Robert Flint, Ph.D.)

Police critical incident situations are characterized as

1. Sudden and unexpected
2. Disrupt one's sense of control
3. Disrupt beliefs, values, and basic assumptions concerning how the world, and people within it, works
4. Involve the perception of a life damaging threat
5. May include element of physical or emotional loss
6. A critical incident for one may not be a critical incident for another - it depends on one's perception of vulnerability and his degree of control over a situation.

Line of Duty Police Critical Incidents

More specifically, critical incidents include line of duty events that affect officers to varying degrees of impact. These events include

1. Violent death of officer in the line of duty.
2. Taking a life in the line of duty
3. Shooting someone in the line of duty
4. Suicide of a fellow officer
5. Violent or traumatic injury to officer
6. Responding to and/or handling of infant mortality
7. Responding to and/or handling multiple fatalities
8. Responding to and/or handling a prolonged rescue operation in which victims expire
9. Responding to and/or handling a barricaded suspect
10. Responding to and/or handling a hostage taking and negotiation
11. High speed chase resulting in serious injury/fatality
12. Mass disaster/casualty situation

13. Excessive media coverage of a police action

The recent line of duty deaths, fatal encounters with subjects, gruesome scenes and tragic events experienced by officers in Michigan and the United States, remind us of the constant dangers law enforcement and emergency service personnel face.

The impact on police personnel of the terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have reinforced awareness and concern about the psychological stress associated while responding to critical incidents and mass disaster events.

Such incidents confront emergency personnel with scenes of horror and destruction. Stressors such as these, often precipitate physical and/or psychological stress symptoms which can sometimes have either short-term or longer lasting effects on personnel.

The psychological impact on emergency responders to the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks points to the profound stress reactions that are common among these personnel. *The New York City Police Department ordered 55,000 of its personnel to participate in mandatory crisis debriefings in order to help them overcome the traumatic impact the search and rescue, and body extrication activities had on them.*

Police personnel enter their profession because of a great empathy for others and a sincere desire to assist others and their community in extreme periods of need. Public and personal expectations of law enforcement personnel are high. The public often assumes police are devoid of normal human emotions as they perform their difficult duties in a calm, professional and cool manner. However, this is certainly not true. Wide ranges of emotions are experienced during the ongoing response to police critical incidents. Emergency personnel may experience feelings of disbelief, shock, helplessness, fear, terror, and sadness in responding to critical incidents.

These emotions often are exacerbated when Departments fail to recognize and to deal effectively with the stressors officers experience. To admit the need to seek mental health support is often viewed as a sign of weakness. The officer may be reluctant to seek help from mental health counselors with no background in police cultures. Officers often think this may raise questions as to their abilities in performing their duties.

However, one thought we must always keep in mind when we respond to scenes is:

“This ain’t the movies and you ain’t James Bond”.

We must remember that officers are human beings first, and police officers second. When we respond to incidents, we have to balance and connect with our own humanity and emotions, or we can become overwhelmed in ways that affect our careers, our families and our sense of pleasure in life.

Impact off Critical Incidents on Officers

After being involved in an intense, unusual, or abnormal event (a critical incident), officers may experience reactions that are out of the ordinary for them. This is not an uncommon experience. The event may create a stress response, which can result in changes in one’s usual physical or emotional reactions. These reactions are normal reactions that normal officers may experience.

Generally these reactions appear immediately after the event, but they may appear hours, weeks or months later. Some of the more common reactions reported by individuals after a critical incident include:

PHYSICAL	EMOTIONAL	COGNITIVE	BEHAVIORAL
Nausea	Anxiety	Memory Problems	Withdrawal
Intestinal upset	Grief	Poor attention	Restlessness
Fatigue	Anger	Guilt, Self-Blame	Nightmares
	Emotional outbursts		
Rapid heart	Denial	Intrusive images	Increased alcohol
Chest pain*	Fear	Hyper-alertness	Avoidance
Difficulty Breathing	Depression	Loss of orientation	Change in speech
Shock symptoms*	Panic	Poor problem solving	Change in Appetite
Muscle cramps	Apprehension	Poor decisions	Startle reflex
Headaches	Disturbed thinking	Sleep disturbance	Blaming others
Chills	Self-doubt	Flashbacks	
	Frustration		
	Fear of Scrutiny	Seeing painful mental pictures of event	
	Fear of a repetition	Vulnerability	
		Visual, Hearing, Time Distortion	
	Loss of a sense of immortality and invulnerability		

This is not an inclusive list. Some officers exposed to the same event may not suffer any effects at all and this, too, is normal reaction. While these reactions can be alarming and unsettling, it is important to remember that the officer is “not losing his/her mind” or “falling apart.”

It is important for personnel to understand that these are normal reactions, normal officers may experience after an abnormal event. The intensity and frequency of these reactions usually decrease after one to three weeks.

Police Officer Crisis Intervention Support

A variety of crisis intervention techniques have been developed that prove effective with police personnel. These techniques include critical incident debriefing sessions, the goals of which are:

1. Conduct post-traumatic debriefings
2. Provide safety and support to officers
3. Encourage emotional ventilation
4. Promote recall of incident in a safe setting
5. Explore impact of trauma on officers
6. "Normalize" stress reactions
7. Educate officers about stress

8. Predict and prepare officers with possible future stress reactions
9. Suggest coping strategies
10. Link officers to additional counseling if needed
11. Follow up with officers to assess for any delayed reactions or issues as they return to work.
12. Mobilize peer support by other officers
13. Educate Command about “normal reactions, normal officers” have after a traumatic incident.

Progressive law enforcement departments and POAM are aware that specific crisis intervention techniques are extremely valuable in helping officers adjust to and manage line of duty critical incidents. Such techniques, quickly delivered by police psychologists and mental health professionals familiar with police cultures, are extremely valuable in helping officers, assisting families, preventing suicides, and protecting police officer careers.

Officers and POAM Reps can contact the POAM Life LINE authors with personal questions or issues they may want to explore further in terms of police life, the officers they represent, traumatic incidents and officer well-being.

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Kenneth L. Wolf, Ph.D.

Dr. Kenneth L. Wolf consults on Threat Management, Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) and Crisis Response Strategies. Since 1984 Dr. Wolf has been the Crisis Response Consultant to the Police Officers Association of Michigan (POAM) Critical Incident Stress Management Team (CISM) Lifeline Program serving Michigan departments.

Dr. Wolf assisted US Army Infantry Units on-site at Ground Zero and the Fresh Kills Land Fill after the World Trade Center Terrorist attack and has trained mass casualty crisis recovery teams for two Army military commands and private sector clients. He has been a Violence Management and Crisis Response Consultant to the United States Postal Service and assisted with site management and critical incident debriefing logistics following the mass shootings at the United States Post Office in Royal Oak (1991) and Dearborn, Michigan (1993). He also assisted with Crisis Management Response after the Northwest air disasters of Flight #255 (1987) and Northwest Flights #299 and #1482 (1990). Dr. Wolf assisted Ryder System and UAW- General Motors after the Oklahoma City Terrorist bombing.

As a Police Psychologist, Dr. Wolf has consulted in critical incident stress management (CISM) programs with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) EAP, the U.S. Marshals Service, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC), Glynco, GA., U.S. Bureau of Prisons, Office of the U.S. Attorney General, U.S. Postal Service, Los Alamos National Laboratory, National Aeronautical and Space Agency (NASA) Langley, and has been a Senior Crisis Consultant to Wayne, Oakland and Macomb County’s Emergency Management Response Teams and the Psychological Crisis Consultant to Wayne County’s Weapons of Mass Destruction Response Team (Chemical/Biological Weapons).

From 1977-1985, Dr. Wolf was a Police Psychological Consultant to the Detroit Police Department working with the Director of Personnel, Medical Section, Training Division, Personal Affairs Unit, Special Events, Communications and Narcotics Units. He performed fitness for duty evaluations, consulted on critical incident stress response (CISD) for officers in line-of- duty incidents, post- shooting trauma, conducted management studies regarding police suicides in the DPD, organizational work factors in the Civilian Dispatch Center and conducted short-term counseling for officers and family members reacting to stress, substance abuse and other personal problems.

From 1985-1995, Dr. Wolf was a sworn Special Deputy Sheriff with the Wayne County Sheriff's Department and was on the Executive Administrative Staff of the Sheriff. He was Director of the Sheriff's Department's EAP and Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Team. For over 10 years, he trained peer deputy and correctional officer Crisis Intervention Teams for law enforcement critical incidents which were utilized after jail disturbances, assaults, shootings, mass casualty incidents (three Northwest Airplane crashes at the Airport) and line of duty critical incidents. He also consulted with Command on organizational issues and conducted fitness for duty evaluations, employee assessments for distressed officers, counseling services for officers and their family members and taught in the Sheriff's Department Police Academy. From 1986-1994, he was a Crisis Coordinator of the Wayne County Office of Emergency Operations.

From 2003-2009, Dr. Wolf was Adjunct Faculty at Michigan State University, School of Criminal Justice, where he taught seminars in Threat Assessment and Crisis Management. He was an MCOLES instructor and taught the MCOLES funded course, *Training Police, Correction Officers, Probation, Parole and Court Personnel on How to Manage Contacts with Mentally Ill Citizens*. He has taught this course for three years to police, sheriffs departments statewide and for the Michigan Department of Corrections. He also taught at the Miami Dade College School of Criminal Justice and has been on the faculty of the Institute for Continuing Education (ICLES) sponsored by the State Bar of Michigan and University of Michigan Law School.

In conjunction with Oakland University CREST, Dr Wolf taught the MCOLES course, delivered through 6 SE Michigan Schools of Criminal Justice: *How to Implement Police Department Critical Incident Response Programs*.

Dr. Wolf is a consultant for the U.S. Army and Department of Defense in the areas of Violence Prevention, Protective Intelligence and Crisis Response. He consults with the Defense Logistic Agency (DLA) HQC in Mass Casualty Response to Terrorist Events. Since 1994, he is an Instructor with the U.S. Army Civilian Human Resource Center (CPOCMA) at the U.S. Army Aberdeen Proving Grounds, training Army Command, supervisors and personnel from Army installations world-wide. He has assisted with / implemented training programs for Redstone Installation/ U.S. Aviation and Missile Command, USATA, Army Materiel Command (AMC) Headquarters, U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Ft. Bragg Special Operations Command (USASOC), STRICOM, Naval Warfare Center; Army Test and Evaluation Command (ATEC), Army Evaluation Center (AEC) Aberdeen, Ft. Lewis, Defense Logistics Agency Command (DLA HQC) Fort Belvoir, Defense Logistics Information Service (DLIS), Fort Meade, Fort McAlester, Fort Drum, Blue Grass Army Depot, Polk Air Force Base, Kirtland AFB, Rock Island Arsenal, Fort McCoy and Fort Carson.

Dr. Wolf was given the USASOC Medallion for Excellence by Lieutenant General Philip Kensinger, Jr., Commander, for his training on Violence Prevention, Threat Assessment and Crisis Recovery After Mass Casualty Events at Military Installations, on May 7, 2003, conducted at Ft. Bragg Special Operations Command (USASOC), Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Dr. Wolf assisted in writing the National Critical Incident Crisis Programs for UAW-General Motors, UAW-DaimlerChrysler, Pinkerton, and American Natural Resources (ANR) and trained their Crisis Response Team members at their North American facilities, respectively. He also helped develop global Violence Prevention/Threat Management Programs for Intel and Eaton Corporation and trained threat assessment teams in North America, England, Holland, Switzerland, China, Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines, Malaysia and Southeast Asia, and for BASF, Pinkerton, Nortel.

He is a disaster consultant for the Detroit affiliates of ABC, NBC and CBS television. Dr. Wolf received his B.A. from Columbia College and his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Wayne State University.

Marilyn Knight, M.S.W.

Marilyn Knight, M.S.W. is the President/CEO of the Incident Management Team (IMT), an international Crisis Management, Security and Violence Prevention consulting company. As a lecturer and trainer in the areas of Workplace Violence Prevention, Crisis Response and Organizational Change, she has presented at over 400 conferences and seminars in North America, South America, Europe, Hong Kong, China, and Asia.

While employed at UAW-General Motors, she held numerous UAW positions including President of her Local Union in Flint. She was a member of the EAP Team, Community Coordinator and Business Unit Advisor during implementation of their joint programs.

Ms. Knight has been a Coordinator of the Police Officers Association of Michigan (POAM) Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Lifeline Program serving Michigan police departments Ms. Knight since 1988. She was a sworn Special Deputy with Genesee County and Wayne County Sheriff's Departments. She was a Coordinator of the Sheriff's Department EAP and Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Team, and has assisted in training law enforcement

departments in Advanced Hostage Negotiations, Responding to Emotionally Disturbed Persons, and Critical Incident Response. She developed a Threat Assessment /Workplace Violence Train-The-Trainer Program for law enforcement Crime Prevention personnel and has presented this training to officers representing multiple police departments in Michigan and Michigan Association of Hostage Negotiators (MAHN). She is a Psychological Consultant to the Wayne County Emergency Operation Center Weapons of Mass Destruction (Chemical/Biological) Response Team and has trained or consulted on Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) for the State of Michigan MIOSHA Investigators, Accident Fund, the Macomb County Emergency Response Team. Other departments with whom she has consulted include the police departments of Detroit, Dearborn, Livonia, Farmington, West Bloomfield, Community EMS and the Detroit Fire Department.

Ms. Knight has been Co-Director, Violence Prevention and Crisis Management Programs, Michigan State University, School of Criminal Justice where she teaches seminars in Threat Assessment and Crisis Management and Recovery, and Training Law Enforcement, Probation and Corrections Officers to Manage Contacts with Mentally Ill Citizens, from 2003-2008, and Director, Corporate Education Program for Michigan State University Safe Place. She has been on the Adjunct Faculty of the Institute for Continuing Legal Education (ICLES) sponsored by the State Bar of Michigan and the University of Michigan Law School.

She assisted in writing the National Critical Incident Response Programs for UAW-General Motors, UAW-Daimler-Chrysler, KeyBank, American Natural Resources (ANR) and Pinkerton, and in training their Crisis Response Team members at their North American facilities. She has also consulted with Ford Motor Corporation, Eaton, NBC, Wendy's, Siemens Corporation, Lockheed-Martin, Comcast Cable, Delphi, TRW, BASF, Rockwell Automotive, New York Consolidated Edison, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, McDonalds and First Chicago-National Bank of Detroit.

Ms. Knight assisted US Army Infantry Units with critical incident stress management (CISM) activities after the World Trade Center Terrorist attack. In the aftermath of the terrorist bombing of the Alfred Murrah Building in Oklahoma City, Ms. Knight was the on-site Crisis Responder and Consultant to the Ryder Corporation. She was an on-site Crisis Response Consultant assisting the United States Postal Service in Critical Incident Response and site-logistics after the mass shootings at the Royal Oak (1991) and Dearborn (1993) Michigan Post Offices and conducted Crisis Intervention Services for Northwest Airlines after the air disasters of NW Flights # 1093 and 1043 (1991). She is the Director of a State of Michigan MIOSHA Grant (2005) preparing first responders to manage the impact of terrorist and mass casualty events.

Ms. Knight has consulted with Fortune 500 companies in the areas of Violence Prevention, Threat Assessment, and Organizational Change and Crisis Management. She assisted Intel Corporation in the design of their Workplace Violence Prevention System and training of their Workplace Response Teams in North America, the Philippines, Malaysia and Southeast Asia. She assisted Eaton Corporation in training their Corporate Threat Assessment Teams, worldwide.

She was the strategic Organizational Change Consultant to UAW-Chrysler and Los Alamos National Laboratory during their period of large-scale reorganization and reduction in force. Other organizations she has assisted during organizational change, downsizing and plant closures are Southern California Edison, Eaton, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, BASF, Detroit Medical Center, Tower Automotive and the State Departments of Labor of Michigan, Iowa, Nebraska and New Mexico.

Ms. Knight has consulted with the Department of Defense, Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) HQC with Mass Casualty Management after Terrorist Events (2005) and with protective intelligence and threat management with the United States Army, U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Redstone Arsenal, STRICOM-Naval Warfare Center, Fort Bragg Special Operations Command, U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Command, Fort Meade, Fort Lewis, Kirtland AFB, Polk Air Force Base, the Army Test and Evaluation Command (ATEC), Army Evaluation Center (AEC), Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) Fort Belvoir, the Army Defense Logistic Agency (DLIS), Fort Drum, U.S. Coast Guard, New Jersey National Guard and the Air National Guard, Selfridge Air Force Base. Other federal agencies for whom she has consulted include the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), the Library of Congress, the National Aeronautical and Space Agency (NASA), U.S. Department of Labor- OSHA and the U.S. Department of Education.

Ms. Knight was invited by the United States Department of Labor, OSHA Division, to represent the U.S. at the first Tri-National (US, Canada and Mexico) Conference on Workplace Violence and its' Prevention in Montreal, Canada.

She is also the Director of a State of Michigan Department of Labor, MIOSHA Safety, Education and Training (SET) funded Grant, the purpose of which is to help corporations, employers and governmental entities develop Violence Prevention Policies and Infrastructures, Threat Assessment Teams and Post-Incident Crisis Response contingency plans

through which she has trained participants from over 1500 companies in Michigan.

Ms. Knight was the Producer and Writer of a 2004 MIOSHA funded training DVD entitled, *Workplace Violence Prevention- Implementing Your Program*, which won two 26th National Annual Telly Finalist Awards in the Corporate Training and Health and Safety Categories, respectively. In 2006, Ms. Knight, was funded by MIOSHA to produce an instructional DVD entitled: *Reducing the Impact of and Managing Workplace Emergencies and Disasters*, which won two 28th National Annual Telly Awards in the Corporate Training and Under \$700 per minute categories.

Ms. Knight received her B.A. degree from the University of Michigan and her Masters of Social Work (M.S.W.) from Wayne State University. She was on the Board of Directors of the National Association of Social Workers, Michigan Chapter. She has been engaged as a News Analyst for ABC News for analysis of violent and traumatic incidents.