

THE EFFECTIVE HEALTH AND WELLNESS PROGRAMS OF LAW ENFORCERS

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THE EFFECTIVE HEALTH AND WELLNESS PROGRAMS OF LAW ENFORCERS

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Thank you to my wife, Rochelle, for her support and encouragement during all of my studies.

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Finally, to all of the law enforcement officers out there, thank you for your service and sacrifice. Take care of yourselves.

Abstract

Law enforcement is an occupation full of health risks and concerns. Research has demonstrated that law enforcement officers when compared to other occupations have increased risk of heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and suicide. Although these findings have prompted many agencies to take steps in improving health-related services, few agencies offer comprehensive wellness programs that address the whole person. A holistic wellness program is developed with the understanding that physical fitness, mental health, nutrition, and stress management are so closely intertwined that none can be neglected without impacting another. Agency managers are encouraged to develop and implement a wellness program that fulfills all of the health needs of their employees. Success of these programs requires not only participation but an understanding, at all levels, that wellness is a vital component to overall career success.

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The Health and Wellness of Law Enforcers

I. Introduction

Law enforcement is an essential component to the survival of our society but is considered by many to be one of the most health-threatening occupations available (Tanigoshi, Kontos, & Remley, 2008). Supporting that notion, there is a considerable amount of evidence indicating that law enforcement officers have an increased risk of premature death (Tanigoshi et al., 2008). Though research has drawn attention to the negative impact of the law enforcement occupation on an individual's health, the response of agencies has been limited. While the topics of critical incident stress and post traumatic stress in law enforcement have garnered increased attention, the subject of overall health and wellbeing of officers continues in many cases to be neglected. There exists a real need for comprehensive wellness training specific to law enforcement officers.

Statement of the Problem

Addressing the issue requires an understanding of the problem. Law enforcement has the potential to affect an officers wellness both physically and mentally. Ronald Getz (as cited in Ebling, 2002) states that of the 149 occupations examined in his study, law enforcement holds the distinction of having the highest rate of diabetes, heart disease, and suicide. Similarly, Violanti, Vena, and Marshall (as cited in Blum, 2000) found that there was an increased risk of dying from cancer for officers with 19 years when compared with civilian controls. In yet another study, the risk of heart attack was found to double with each decade of police-service when compared to the general population (Quigley, 2008). This increased risk of disease can

frequently be attributed to lifestyle choices in the areas of physical fitness, nutrition, sleep habits, and coping behaviors.

In addition to physical health deficiencies, law enforcement officers suffer one of the highest rates of divorce when compared to other professionals. Nationally, where the divorce rate for society is around 50 percent, police officers experience a divorce rate as high as 70 percent (Mattos, 2010). The first reaction of many to this may be to shrug it off with the idea that one's domestic life is not necessarily relevant to the work place. This domestic stress, however, often negatively affects the job performance of first responders and those experiencing ongoing stress are more likely to display anger in their duties (Westphal & Openshaw, 2009). Stress on officers and on officer families can affect the entire agency by impairing officer performance, reducing morale, damaging public perception, and increasing expenses through absenteeism, turnover, overtime and even civil suits. Some agencies such as NYPD and the University of Arizona Police Department have recognized the impact that domestic stress has on their members and have implemented programs to help reduce stress and increase marital satisfaction (Thomas, 2008). Unfortunately the use of such programs remains limited to a small number of agencies at this time.

Just as stress can come from multiple sources, it has the potential to wreak havoc on one's wellness in a variety, both physical and mental, of ways. Varying forms of stress and the effects that stress has on law enforcement has garnered much attention in the past two decades. Indeed, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has frequented headlines and newscasts concerning law enforcement and U.S. combat forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is not to suggest that the attention is unwarranted. According to a study by Kirschman (as cited in

Tanigoshi, et al., 2008), approximately 15% of all emergency-service workers suffer from PTSD. One of the most familiar programs being utilized by law enforcement agencies to address PTSD is the Critical Incident Debriefings. Unfortunately, this program is limited to dealing with acute incidents after the fact. There has been little research literature dedicated to understanding the coping process of emergency workers (Iwasaki, Butcher, Mannell, and Smale, 2002). Additionally, few agencies appear to be employing programs that preemptively address the chronic-stressors confronting law enforcement officers.

Significance of the Problem

As stated above, the impact that law enforcement has on those in the occupation are many, varying from marital difficulties to heart disease, increased obesity to suicide. Sadly, the profession lacks any widespread implementation of preventive wellness training (Mattos, 2010). For many agencies, whether due to tight budgets, personnel shortages, or other reasons, training law enforcers to achieve emotional wellbeing is not seen as a priority (Gilmartin, 2002). Nevertheless, there is strong rationale for creating and implementing a wellness program for law enforcers. Exercise alone is associated with reduced absenteeism, improved health, and fewer turnovers (Boyce & Hiatt, 1992). With an estimated cost of an in-service heart attack ranging between \$400,000 and \$750,000 the cost benefits of a fitness program can be quickly realized (FitForce, 2010). Besides the monetary benefits that accompany an effective wellness program in terms of such areas as increased productivity and decreased use of sick time, many would deem wellness programming as “doing the right thing” for those that have chosen to work as public servants (Mattos, 2010).

At one time, *healthy* simply meant that you were without visible disease or symptoms of disease. Now, due to a greater understanding of symptom-less disease, the invisible effects of stress on the mind, and the aging process health is more comprehensively defined to include physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. This change in perspective is useful because it helps define the problem. Although wellness programs in law enforcement are not currently widespread, some agencies have taken the initiative to seek out ways of improving their officers' health. For example, the FBI's Yellow Brick Road and SMILE programs are being held out to other agencies as a means of encouraging and implementing physical fitness (Ebling, 2002). Improved methods of measuring wellness such as the Indivisible Self method has led to research studying the effectiveness of individual wellness counseling sessions for law enforcers (Tanigoshi, et al., 2008; Myers & Sweeney, 2004). The chore is not only finding programs that are effective but implementing them in a way that is legal and employee-embraced.

Purpose of this Paper

The purpose of this paper is to not only draw attention to continuing deficits in the health of law enforcement but to advocate for implication of specific, effective wellness programs. A literature review will be conducted in order to recognize and examine law enforcement-specific health threats and what these threats mean for law enforcement officers, the agencies that employ them, and the communities that they serve. Once specific threats have been identified, this paper will examine programs and methods for effectively countering the existing threats. Finally, the paper will conclude by providing a recommended program and course of action to law enforcement personnel. The suggested program will be geared toward encouraging agencies and

individuals to move from a reactionary posture to a preemptive posture; the ultimate goal of the paper being increased health and wellness of society's law enforcers.

II. Literature Review of the Problem

The problem facing law enforcement is a multifaceted one. The first aspect of the problem is that law enforcement is a unique occupation, full of physical and mental hazards that are not present or not present to the same degree in many alternative occupations. Arising from these unique occupational components is the problem of suffering health of law enforcers. This is evidenced through mortality rates, disease, divorce, and even suicide. The final portion of this problem is the lack of effective, comprehensive wellness programs in law enforcement agencies. While many agencies provide some component of wellness training, few offer programs that are encompassing.

The job of law enforcement can be both dangerous and stressful (Ortmeier & Meese, 2010; Church & Robertson, 1999). It is important to recognize that each of these components can have mental and physical health implications for law enforcers. For example, an officer suffering from chronic stress may show signs of diminishing cardiovascular health as well as the mental symptoms associated with depression or post traumatic stress disorder. Similarly, an officer in physical danger of being assaulted risks suffering not just torn ligaments or bodily injury but must also face the mental aspect of being harmed by a fellow human being.

There is much literature dedicated to identifying specific physical and psychological threats to law enforcement with the goal of *reducing* those threats. While it is important for this paper to identify many of those same threats, the focus of this paper is dedicated to providing officers with the means to physically and mentally prepare to successfully deal with those threats.

Physical Health

Considering that most law enforcement agencies recognize the importance of physical fitness for their officers and conduct physical fitness screening prior to hiring, one might expect law enforcement to be examples of a fit workforce (Ebling, 2002). Actually, the case is the opposite. Literature shows that when compared to national averages law enforcement officers have higher rates of cancer, diabetes, heart disease, and premature death (Tangiوشي et al, 2008; Quigley, 2008). To suggest that law enforcers' health is worse than national averages does not say much considering that national averages are already so poor. For example, according to a study by Trust for America's Health, one in four Wisconsin residents are obese (as cited in Boulton, 2011). Nationally, it is estimated that around 34% of the adult population is obese (Flegal, Carroll, Ogden, & Curtin, 2010). Yet the death rate from unpredicted coronary death for police officers with 19 years of service is 300 percent greater than the civilian control groups (Blum, 2000). While life expectancy for males in the U.S. was 72.9 years, the same year found retired male police officers with an expectancy of only 66 (Shell, 2005; National Center for Health Statistics, 1996).

The problem of cardiovascular disease in law enforcement has become so well documented that some state legislatures have implemented laws regarding it. Florida, Ohio, and Massachusetts are examples of states that have in place presumptive laws regarding the cardiovascular health of law enforcement (International Association of Fire Fighters, 2011; Florida Senate, 2010). These laws presume that cardiovascular health problems detected in officers hired with a clean bill of health are due to the official work of that the officer. At least

one study has found that the risk of heart in officers doubles with each decade of service (Quigley, 2008).

There are a number of factors thought to contribute to the overall poor physical health of law enforcement. Poor diets, lack of physical training, many hours wearing a heavy belt and vest, interrupted sleep schedules, and the roller coaster of biological effects on the body from going from normal to life-threatening situations, perhaps multiple times per shift.

In his book, *On Killing*, (1996) Lt. Col. Grossman describes the effects of extremely stressful circumstances on the body. According to Grossman, the sympathetic nervous system is responsible for mobilizing and directing the body's energy for action while the parasympathetic system is responsible for such things as digestion and recuperative processes. The majority of the time these two systems are in balance in their demands on the body. During an emergency or perceived emergency, however, the sympathetic nervous system can take *all* available energy for survival. Activities nonessential to surviving the emergency such as digestion are halted. This results in a physiological price for the individual involved (Grossman, 1996). The neglected demands of the parasympathetic system exact a "backlash" on the body as soon as the excitement is over. Fatigue, for example, is one of the products. For law enforcers these roller-coaster surges of adrenaline followed by backlashes of fatigue can take a toll. Imagine going from dealing with a noisy birthday party, to responding to a "possible man-with-gun" call, to taking the report of a minor fender-bender all within a couple hours' time. Law enforcers must frequently deal with the results of having had large amounts of adrenaline pumped into their systems. Grossman (2008) says these adrenalin dumps can be an even greater problem for law enforcement than it is for those in combat because frequently in law enforcement there is no

means of burning off the remaining amounts of adrenalin. Officers are sometimes left with the effects of that adrenaline in the form of dilated heart vessels with increased blood pressure, tensed muscles, dilated bronchial tubes, upset stomach, and difficulty sleeping: each capable of contributing to long-term health problems.

Law enforcement is most commonly staffed 24-hours, seven-days-a-week. For some officers this means working during what most consider sleeping hours. Besides interrupting family and social activities, disrupting one's sleep cycle can throw off other physical cycles such as hunger routines (Cochrane, 2001). Sleep loss has been shown to increase insulin resistance, decrease glucose tolerance, deteriorate mood, cause gastrointestinal upsets, cause weight gain, decrease work production, exaggerate chronic illnesses, and increase the risk of heart attack and coronary heart disease (Anderson, 2003; Mayhew, 2001). In a study conducted with the Albuquerque, NM Police Department it was found that night shift officers reported a higher incidence of difficulty in remembering, a greater degradation in their ability to handle minor irritation, and driving drowsy at a significantly higher occurrence rate than their counterparts on the day and evening shifts (Cochrane, 2001).

The saying, "a healthy workforce means a more productive workforce" is true regardless of occupation. For law enforcement there are additional incentives to maintaining fitness due to the unique occupational reality: assaults and homicides are an issue. According to the FBI, in 2009 there were more than 57,000 law enforcement officers assaulted while performing their duties (FBI, 2009). This means a rate of 10.3 assaults per 100 sworn officers. An officer that is well-rested and healthy is not only less likely to be injured due to physical flexibility and properly functioning perception, senses, and decision-making skills, they are in a much better

place to recuperate if they are injured. Physical fitness can even protect officers from becoming victims. The law enforcement officer that presents a fit, alert image reduces the chances of being pegged a “soft target” (Quigley, 2008). Society expects its law enforcers to be ready and able to respond whatever the call may be. The physical health of officers remains an essential component to this readiness.

Mental Health

Law enforcement is a stressful occupation. Officers face an unending barrage of crises composed of job danger, critical incidents, lawsuits, exposure to violence, and shift work (Larned, 2010). Through the course of their duties, officers are frequently exposed to and required to deal with the most antisocial and mistrustful elements of their society (He, Zhao, & Archbold, 2005). Though it is true that stress can be categorized as *eustress* (good stress) and *distress* and that there are some benefits to performance with eustress, the focus of this paper is identifying the problems associated with stress and identifying successful means of overcoming those problems.

Emotional stress has the potential to create a long list of detrimental effects which have an impact on the abilities and duties of a law enforcement officer. For example, emotional stress can lead to fatigue, concentration deficiencies, forgetfulness, a slowed reaction time, and irritability (Matsakis, 2005). Dealing with stress can be a vicious cycle. Dr. Matsakis (2005) says that for some, dealing with stress leads to stress reactions which in-turn have the potential to create even greater stress (producing additional reactions) and so on. Even seeking professional

help to deal with one's stress frequently requires time and money, the allocation of which can lead to added stress.

It is sometimes difficult to separate mental health and physical health into individual components. Stress is one of those factors that can affect mental and physical, or both, areas of an officer's health. Professors Marras and Heaney found in a study that spinal compression and, as a result, back pain/injury, was dramatically increased as stress in the workplace increased (Institute of Industrial Engineers, 2001). Research has shown that an individual that repeatedly encounters stressful situations will experience a literal alteration of neural pathways in the brain (Blum, 2000). Other physical ailments that stress has been linked to include cardiovascular disease, hypertension, gastrointestinal disorders, and lower back pain (Quigley, 2008).

Blum (2000) states that work related stress causes two types of lethal threat to an officer. The first is the compromise to an officer's physical health such as cardiovascular disease. The second threat is the mental activity, or lack thereof, that plays a direct role in the causal factors compromising an officer's safety and survival. A slowed reaction time or a lessened degree of concentration can be costly for officers involved in kinetic, dangerous situations.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a label that has become much more common in the general media. Though it has been around for thousands of years there seems to be a much greater recognition of its existence. PTSD is just that, a stress disorder. It is a psychological condition composed of several groups of symptoms (Kates, 1999). PTSD is capable of disrupting one's sleep, relationships, work, and physical health (Kates, 1999).

Frequently, PTSD is associated with combat troops but PTSD can affect anyone that has experienced or witnessed traumatic events and responded with fear, helplessness, or horror

(Kates, 1999). The American Psychiatric Association estimates that as many as 14 percent of people will develop PTSD for a period at some point in their lives (Kates, 1999). Law enforcers, through virtue of their duties, are even more likely to encounter circumstances capable of generating PTSD. While it is generally accepted that 1 percent of the American population has PTSD at any one time, it is estimated that 15 percent of emergency workers are suffering from the disorder (Kates, 1999; Tanigoshi, et al. 2008).

Clinical depression and PTSD are commonly found in dangerous occupations (Mataskis, 2005). In addition to the assaults on officers, the FBI reported that in 2009 there were 48 officers feloniously killed in the line of duty (FBI, 2009). This number does not include the many officers killed through on-duty accidents or work related illnesses. Matsakis describes the stress of living in fear of assault or death as “living under the sword” (Matsakis, 2005). Functioning on a day-to-day basis with a heightened level of alertness and tension is not only fatiguing but can also lead to health problems such as hypertension.

Divorce

One of the major sources of stress in police work comes from the work-family relationship (He et al., 2005). In a study cited by Finn and Tomz (1996), 77 percent of spouses reported unusually high amounts of stress from the officers’ job. The sources of this stress included shift work, overtime, officer’s attitude of cynicism, the fear of harm to the officer, and even the presence of a firearm in the home (Finn & Tomz, 1996).

Stress in officers’ lives is sometimes evidenced by divorce (Ortmeier & Meese, 2010). Nationally, police officers have a divorce rate of about 70 percent compared to a societal rate of

about 50 percent (Mattos, 2010). Just as stress can lead to behavior or situations that increase the chances of divorce, divorce can illicit a stress reaction in those involved. Dealing with stress, there is the potential of developing a harmful cycle. In a study by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, it was found that adults that are divorced or separated have a significantly higher Serious Psychological Distress (SPD) than those who are married or widowed (Wisconsin Department of Health Services, 2009).

Along with the physical health problems listed above, stress from a divorce or separation, or even just an unhappy relationship can have an impact on an officers abilities on the job. Those experiencing ongoing domestic stress are more likely to display anger in the course of their duties (Westphal & Openshaw, 2009). Stress resulting from a domestic situation is just as dangerous to an officer and to the agency as other types of stress and therefore should be a concern for administrators.

Substance Abuse

Many officers are unsuccessful in coping with the stresses of their occupation and unfortunately turn to alcohol or other drugs to “aid” them. Alcohol abuse in law enforcement is about double that of the general population (Mayhew, 2001). Could it be that the personality types that are drawn to law enforcement might also be drawn to substance abuse? It is possible that personality might play a role, however, substance abuse is generally seen as a negative coping strategy used to deal with the psychological and physical stress of the job (He et al, 2005). Grossman (2008) states that many officers turn to alcohol as a self-prescribed means of

coping with the residual effects of adrenaline left in the system following a stressful shift. For some, it is what they turn to just to get to sleep.

Substance abuse can have a direct and negative effect on many areas of an officer's health. Liver disease, increased depression, and increased risk of obesity are a few of the familiar effects. Officers also risk impaired judgment and performance while on duty. Media exposure of even a single incident involving officers abusing alcohol or other drugs can diminish the public trust of an entire agency (Finn & Tomz, 1996).

Cost

A successful wellness program shouldn't focus on simply improving test scores for participants. A successful wellness program deals with preserving a law enforcement agency's most valuable asset: its personnel. Increased vulnerabilities to on-duty injury and illness, increased exposure to liability, and even loss of respect by the public are all consequences and costs of diminished health and fitness in law enforcement (FitForce, 2010).

In law enforcement, heart disease accounts for between 20 and 50 percent of early retirements with back problems accounting for another 15-35 percent (Quigley, 2008). Agencies are faced with not only paying out disability benefits, they must now cover the loss of labor through overtime or other means and conduct a recruitment and hiring to backfill any vacancies. The expenses can quickly add up. Walsh, et al. found that hidden costs associated with necessities such as overtime and part-time replacements to address absenteeism, provision of benefits to absent workers, indirect costs of lowered morale, loss of productivity, and increased

turnover of employees costs American companies approximately \$37 billion annually (as cited in Church & Robertson, 1999).

Keeping in mind the increased risk of cardiovascular disease for law enforcers, various law enforcement agencies have calculated the cost of an in-service heart attack at between 400 and 700 thousand dollars (Quigley, 2008). Unhealthy officers present a real budgetary risk to their agencies. With that said, analyses of wellness programs in corporate business has supported the continuation of wellness programing, indicating a benefit of two to five dollars for every dollar spent on program costs (Mathis & Jackson, 1997; Quigley, 2008).

Suicide

It is difficult to fully express the detrimental impact a suicide can have on those people closely tied to the victim. At the risk of sounding insensitive, suicide could be considered the ultimate (negative) form of absenteeism or employee turnover. Family members, coworkers, the agency, and the community suffer the permanent loss of an individual, unique person when an officer commits suicide. Many will suffer emotional and mental stress as a result. It is generally accepted that beyond the immediate family, suicide will permanently affect at least six other people (Larned, 2010). The sheer financial impact to an agency can be astounding considering the longterm effects that a suicide can have on the wellbeing of those officers remaining. Overtime, hiring, and training costs aside, lasting stress can affect the agency for years to follow.

According to Ortmeier and Meese (2010), the rate of suicide for law enforcement is nearly three times the national average. The law enforcement community loses an officer to suicide, on average, every 17-23 hours (Feemster & Collins, 2010). While much can be said

about the personality of law enforcers and the accessibility to firearms contributing to this increased rate, agencies should not seek to excuse their lack of preemptive action.

Litigation

Today, civil liability is a major concern for law enforcement administrators (Ortmeier & Meese, 2010). An unfit officer engaged in physically demanding or otherwise dangerous situations increases the probability of injury to himself and others (Boyce & Hiatt, 1992). The officer that is unsure of his physical abilities or is physically incapable of maintaining the required degree of exertion is more likely to turn to a higher degree of force to manage the situation. This in turn creates a greater liability and an increased chance of injury to those involved. *Parker v. District of Columbia* is an excellent example of just that type of case where an officer turned to using his firearm to effect an arrest resulting in the offender being rendered a paraplegic. The D.C. Metropolitan Police Department was subsequently found to be deliberately indifferent to the physical training needs of its officers and the plaintiff was awarded a substantial sum of money (Quigley, 2008). The perspective in this situation can easily be reversed to reach a similar conclusion. It is likely that from the perspective of a would-be offender, the out-of-shape/out-of-breath-officer presents a more promising opportunity for productive resistance than the officer that presents himself a fit and sound adversary.

Society expects its law enforcers to exercise discretion even under the most critical of circumstances (He et al, 2005). The mind of the officer that is concerned about how hard he is breathing or how fast his heart is beating is distracted that much more from focusing on the task

at hand. How much more difficult is it to focus on decision-making when one's mind is not receiving the requisite oxygen?

Lack of Programs

Much literature and many studies have been dedicated to identifying and reducing dangers in law enforcement; this is an extremely worthy goal. Still, it is unlikely that the core hazards of law enforcement will be reduced to insignificance. A realistic approach to dealing with these dangers, therefore, includes the development and implementation of effective wellness programs that can combat and, more importantly, prevent the detrimental effects of the job.

Many law enforcement agencies recognize the need for some type of health training. In 2006 the International Association of Chiefs of Police adopted a resolution recognizing the importance of fitness and wellness programs (Quigley, 2008). Most entry-level law enforcement training academies require students to participate in physical fitness training (Reaves, 2009; Shell, 2005). Unfortunately this training sometimes lacks mandated standards relative to exercise science and in many cases is discontinued once the student progresses to being an officer (Shell, 2005). Church and Robertson's (1999) research found that only 16 percent of state police agencies provided on-duty time for exercise and only 18 percent offered workout facilities.

Wellness training goes beyond just physical fitness. A comprehensive wellness program should consist of a minimum of physical fitness, stress management, mental health, nutrition, and substance abuse treatment (Church & Robertson, 1999). Of the 49 states responding to a survey, not one had a wellness program for their state police agencies that included all five of

these listed components (Church & Robertson, 1999). Each of these components are interrelated and essential to the overall health and wellbeing of an officer. Agencies that are not providing this training for their officers must consider the benefits to employing a healthy force. Therefore, it is important to discuss not only the components of a successful program but methods and means of implementing them. With the problem now established, this paper will turn to examining a few of the many existing programs. Many agencies have implemented at least one component of wellness training and these programs can be used in identifying strengths and weaknesses. The goal, of course, is to incorporate successful elements into a complete, law enforcement-oriented wellness program.

III. Current Programs

Wellness and health are not a new topic of discussion for many law enforcement agencies. Many agencies have already taken steps to implement health programs and education for their officers. For example, of the 45 state agencies surveyed by Church and Robertson (1999), 38 of the agencies responded that they had at least one component of a wellness program available to employees. These programs can range from a mandatory physical fitness program to countywide employee assistance programs. This section will briefly examine some of the existing programs.

Employee Assistance Programs

Today, employee assistance programs (EAPs) can be found as an available benefit to many government agencies. Employee assistance programs frequently provide short-term counseling services to employees (and sometimes employee family members) in areas such as marriage, finances, workplace conflict, psychological health, and stress-coping (DataLink, 2010). These programs have advanced and continue to advance from their initial role as an alcohol counseling service. Still, EAPs should not be thought of as wholly sufficient when it comes to law enforcement wellness.

Employee assistance programs are frequently a short-term answer or service that may be able to direct an employee to the long-term counseling or other available resources necessary for the situation. In research conducted by the National Institute of Justice, many law enforcement officers indicated that they choose not to use EAPs because of the perceived lack of confidentiality, the lack of understanding of the EAP for the law enforcement situation, and

because of the stigma associated with using an EAP (National Institute of Justice, 2000; NYC Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, 1998). Unfortunately, besides being underutilized by many officers, in many cases these EAPs do not possess the preventative components needed to maintain wellness and are only turned to once a problem has developed.

These programs should not be viewed as either perfect nor solely sufficient for law enforcement agencies. Critical incident stress debriefings (at times a component of EAPs) were developed because, prior to the 1980s, mental health was very much a neglected topic. According to the developer, critical incident stress debriefings were never intended to be the "stand-alone intervention" (Blythe & Slawinski, 2004, p. 39). Today, there is a growing body of experts that doubt the effectiveness of critical incident stress debriefing and some research that even indicates it could produce negative outcomes (Blythe & Slawinski, 2004).

As with critical incident stress debriefing, experts and even agencies should not be afraid of challenging, refining, and if necessary, replacing their current employee assistance programs. While employee assistance programs provide a valuable resource to employees and have come a long way in responding to an existing need, they continue to lack a preemptive component. Additionally, these programs fail to address the complete list of wellness related activities- neglecting areas such as dietary and physical fitness.

Peer Supported Groups

Another type of wellness program that can be found at various law enforcement agencies is a peer support program. Peer support programs are implemented to reduce and to manage stress in law enforcement officers and the officers' families (Morris, Morgan, & Easton, 2001;

NYC Patrolmen's Benevolent Assoc., 1998). Unlike EAPs that rely on officers turning to outside agencies, peer support programs allow coworkers to be much more involved in recognizing and addressing needs; this is an important aspect of these programs. Much research has been conducted and recorded regarding the cynical attitudes of law enforcement and the resulting "us-versus-them" mentality. Incorporating peers into the solution reduces some of the reluctance and hesitancy that would otherwise be present in seeking help.

One example of a successful peer support program can be found in the work of the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), Old Pueblo Lodge located in Arizona. The overall goal of the Arizona program was the lessening of job related stress symptoms and the improvement of marital/family satisfaction (Morris, Morgan, & Easton, 2001). Intermediary goals of the program included increasing the knowledge and abilities necessary for detecting stress symptoms and improving the abilities to provide effective intervention.

The program began by making connection with department administrators, the officers, and the officers families and providing them information regarding the program and its goals. Description of the Peer Support Team member positions were developed and based on this criteria and descriptions, the Peer Support Team members from each department were selected and recruited for the positions. Once these teams were established, the members received intense training in subjects such as listening skills, types of stress, signs of stress, intervention strategies, law enforcement-specific stress, substance abuse, domestic violence, grieving, and critical incident stress management among others (Morris, Morgan, & Easton, 2001).

After sixteen weeks of operation the FOP program was evaluated. Participants were evaluated pre- and post-program using multiple instruments. Data analyses indicate that the peer

support program had an overall positive effect on the psychological adjustment of the officers (Morris, Morgan, & Easton, 2001). Officers, particularly older officers, displayed a reduced development of symptoms associated with PTSD. Unfortunately, the FOP peer support program did not show any impact on relationship dissatisfaction.

The Arizona FOP and the New York Patrolmen's Benevolent Association's peer support programs provide examples to other agencies of one more available option beneficial to the maintenance of officer mental health (Morris, Morgan, & Easton, 2001; NYC Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, 1998). It is important to keep in mind, however, that to a large degree these programs focus on one aspect of wellness: psychological. Additionally, these programs rely on the ability to recognize symptoms of stress and then work to intervene before the point of "blue-lining" or placing an officer on mandatory sick leave (NYC Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, 1998). The resources that these programs make available may be essential components to a wellness program, but it is unfortunate that the program requires the existence of stress symptoms before it can *react*.

Physical Fitness

Perhaps more familiar than peer support programs, physical fitness "programs" have existed in law enforcement for a long time. Most law enforcement academies use physical fitness training as one of the components of their curriculum (Shell, 2005; Reaves, 2009). Northeast Wisconsin Technical College, for example, requires students enrolled in the academy to complete 54 hours of physical fitness training (NWTC, 2011). Similarly, the majority of law enforcement agencies employ some form of physical fitness standard in the hiring process.

Unfortunately, for many agencies and officers recruit academy is the end of the supervised or required physical fitness requirements. A study by Boyce and Hiatt (1992) examines the physical fitness of officers as they progressed from supervised recruits to 3-year officers. The study found significant gains in physical fitness levels at midterm and end of the recruit training when compared to pre-academy fitness. However, within one year of completing the academy the study found significant losses in cardiovascular endurance and within three years, the male officers were exceeding the body fat levels they had upon entering the academy (Boyce & Hiatt, 1992). It should be pointed out, that the participants in this particular study were members of a large metropolitan police agency that had been operating a health promotion program for more than a decade. Officers in that agency were tested on an annual basis and the results were used in consideration when it came to such things as promotion, assignment, and even retention (Boyce & Hiatt, 1992).

The FBI is an example of an agency that recognizes the importance of physical fitness in the completion of duties and as an effective counter to occupational stress (Ebling, 2002). During the 20 week new agent course, trainees are administered physical fitness tests throughout. These tests consist of sit-ups, sprints, push-ups, and a 1.5 mile run (FBI, 2011). In addition to physical fitness testing during the hiring process and initial academy training, the FBI requires its agents to maintain their fitness throughout their career. The FBI's Focus on Fitness program places emphasis on cardiovascular and strength training in order to promote the health and wellness of its agents (Ebling, 2002). Mandatory fitness tests are conducted annually for all agents.

In testament to the significance the FBI places on physical fitness training, physical fitness is one of the required components of the FBI National Academy (NA). Through the FBI NA officers from throughout the country who have achieved the rank of at least lieutenant are invited to apply and participate in a 10-week professional course in Virginia (Lane, 2005). As a portion of this course, officers are educated on physical fitness through coursework and practical application. Though many of the courses are selected as electives, physical training remains a core component (Lane, 2005). The course might be the easy part for NA attendees as there are established times, facilities, and professional instructors available for the workout. Maintaining this regimen upon returning to one's agency is likely the hard part.

St. Paul Police in Minnesota is another agency that has put an emphasis on physical fitness of their employees. The department has maintained a fitness program for more than 25 years (Panos, 2010). As a result of this history and the success of their program, more than half of the department scores above the seventieth percentile in testing (Panos, 2010). Achieving these results, the St. Paul program involves cooperation from the officers' union, the department administration, and even local businesses.

St. Paul's program requires officers to participate in annual mandatory fitness testing and cardiovascular risk factor screenings. The fitness test consists of body composition analysis, push-ups, sit-ups, vertical jump, and a choice of a 1.5 mile run, 1-mile walk, or a bicycle test (Panos, 2010). Officers that fail to meet acceptable levels of fitness are prescribed an exercise program and allowed to retest in three months. These test results are considered during annual evaluations, promotions, and competitive selections to specialized assignments such as SWAT and motorcycles.

St. Paul's program does much more than place requirements on the officer. The St. Paul program provides resources and encouragement to aid officers in achieving satisfactory fitness. Physical fitness has been made an important component of the culture at St. Paul's department (Panos, 2010). In-house training facilities are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and are equipped with treadmills, stairclimbers, bicycles, weights, and other training machines. Officers are afforded three hours of duty time per week to work out. Additionally, classes on topics such as aerobics, core strengthening, spinning, kettlebells, yoga, and "squad car eating" (diet) are offered on a weekly basis (Panos, 2010). Local fitness centers donate used equipment and a nonprofit organization exists to accept donations and purchase equipment for officer use. The success of St. Paul's program allows them to establish the sixtieth percentile (based on age and gender) for an acceptable level of aerobic, strength, and endurance levels (Panos, 2010).

Programs such as the NYC Patrolmen's Benevolent Assoc. peer support program, the FBI's Focus on Fitness efforts, the FOP programs in Arizona, and the St. Paul Police Department's fitness program demonstrate the efforts taking place across the country to achieve higher levels of wellness in law enforcement. The efforts of these organizations and governmental bodies that support them are indication that there is a willingness to address the issue of wellness in the occupation. These programs, while successful, are aimed only at specific components of the wellness spectrum. In order to address overall wellness, agencies must incorporate programs that include all aspects of wellness: physical, mental, and spiritual health. The next section will provide guidance and suggestions on developing and implementing a program that not only covers these varying aspects of wellness but that is law enforcement specific.

IV. Recommendations for an Ideal Program

Goals

Before considering the components or implementation of a program it is important to review the goals of that program. The purpose of a wellness program is to create a holistic health care environment. The program should address the whole person's needs and risk reduction requirements (Church & Robertson, 1999). There should be a real focus on the prevention of health problems.

Physical Components

The physical capabilities of law enforcement officers are frequently called upon and relied upon in their occupational duties. Society has an expectation that its officers will be healthy and able to respond to its needs. The importance of physical health when it comes to overall wellness cannot be overstated. For these reasons it should be obvious that a wellness program must contain a component that addresses the physical aspect of health.

The first area of the physical component is what is commonly referred to as *physical fitness*. Adapting from the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, FitForce (2010) defines physical fitness as, "the ability to meet life's daily demands, without undue fatigue, while maintaining sufficient energy for leisure time pursuits and to overcome emergency situations that may arise personally or professionally" (p. 5). The physical fitness component to a wellness program should account for the following: cardiovascular endurance, anaerobic power, muscular strength, muscular endurance, flexibility, body composition, agility, and explosive leg power. Specific exercise programs can be developed that address each of these areas of physical fitness

and can be individualized to help achieve the goals of each officer. It may be helpful to think of the individualized program as an “exercise prescription.”

There are many assessment tools in existence to assist in determining the current level of physical fitness of officers. Once the current level has been determined, goals can be set based on professional recommendations and individual goals. Specific exercise prescriptions should put forward advice on frequency, intensity, duration, and types of exercises necessary to achieve the goals. It would be difficult and undesirable for the purposes of this paper to try to address the many different combinations of individual characteristics and specific fitness needs to create a plan for every possible situation. Instead, fitness professionals should be consulted. Travis and Ryan (2004) provide some additional considerations to keep in mind on an individual level when stretching, moving, and exerting the body that include keeping it fun; if it’s painful, stop; use inner balance in every movement; and use every means to stay inspired.

Another area that the physical component of a wellness program should address is *diet*. Over the last 30 years, the U.S. has experienced an increased concern with nutrition and its relation to health (Travis & Ryan, 2004). For approximately the last 20 years the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Agriculture have been providing the public with the Food Guide Pyramid and other recommendations for food intake. Health magazines and publications provide readers with diet after diet that, based on one’s preferences help lose weight, gain muscle, stay energized, or live ethically. Still, we need not look far to see that the diets of many Americans are unhealthy. Heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and kidney disease- these are just some of the deadly conditions that have been linked to diet (Travis & Ryan, 2004).

For many, the law enforcement occupation adds further complication to the issue of diet and nutrition. Many officers work out of their patrol car their entire shift. Officers are expected to take their lunch whenever they can while still remaining available for dispatch. Eating rapidly can have many ill-effects on a persons body. Time pressure creates stress which in turn results in hormonal secretions, increased heart rate, and increased respirations (Travis & Ryan, 2004). Eating in this kind of situation can lead to indigestion and acid reflux. The other option is for an officer to just grab something “quick” to eat. This might mean a fast food establishment or snacks from the convenience store.

Without getting into the specific details essential to a healthy diet, a wellness program should include educational aspects directly related to diet and nutrition. For example, the St. Paul Police department provides officers the opportunity to attend brown bag classes on “squad car eating” (Panos, 2010). Culinary experts or dieticians can be brought in to provide tips or individualized plans for officers.

In today’s era of internet the information that is made available to people includes an abundance of knowledge, recipes, and diets. Education is not the only way an agency can influence diet. In fact, the agency can take an active role in encouraging and fostering healthy eating habits in several different ways.

While not an option for all, some agencies have found it possible to provide employees with an outfitted kitchen including oven, microwave, and refrigerator. Additionally, policies and practice provide alternative ways that agencies can further good dietary habits. For example, allowing officers to call in an “on-duty” break where they remain available for emergency calls but routine dispatches are either held or passed to an available unit. Installation of waterbottle

filling stations encouraging employees to drink more water while reducing waste. Stocking the “soda mess” or vending machine with healthy alternatives to the normal junk foods is another easy improvement.

Health care providers and insurance groups can sometimes offer agencies additional avenues for improving diets. For example, Group Health Cooperative of South Central Wisconsin offers customers a wellness reimbursement program. Reimbursable services include Weight Watchers, Jenny Craig, and Community Supported Agriculture (locally grown foods) (GHC, 2011). Agency leadership should consider these benefits and services when selecting and negotiating with providers.

Finally, a wellness program’s physical component should take into consideration an officer’s ability to sleep and be well-rested. As stated above, law enforcement agencies commonly fulfill their responsibilities 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This means abnormal sleep hours for at least a portion of the workforce. Overtime, court schedules, and mandatory training further the sleep deprivation for many officers.

Sleep is a time for bodies to recover, mend, and grow from the day’s exertion. Sleep allows the body to produce essential hormones and the brain to process through the day’s activities (American Medical Association, 2008). When officers are sleep deprived not only does their mental and physical abilities decrease, their health suffers.

Law enforcement agencies should consider sleep as a portion of their wellness program. Based on a study that she did, Cochrane (2001) makes the following recommendations for law enforcement agencies: limit the number of hours that can be worked within 24 hours, set limits for hours per week, solicit courts for cooperation in devising schedules that are better-suited for

night shift officers, ensure that training opportunities are available to night shifts, record mandatory meetings to allow officers to view them during their regular shifts, and ensure vending machines offer healthy products. In addition to these policy and practice areas, agency wellness programs should provide relaxation techniques and education to improve upon the quality of sleep officers are getting.

Mental Components

Research shows that mental health is not only significant in its own right, it is also significant in its influence on physical health, quality of life, and risk of premature death (Wisconsin Department of Health Services, 2009). It is sometimes difficult to completely and clearly distinguish between the elements of physical and mental health as the two are so closely related and interconnected. The benefit to separating them in this discussion is to demonstrate that the mental aspect of wellness is just as important as the physical.

Employee Assistance Programs have taken some criticism for being too reactive when it comes to providing a wellness program. In many cases that criticism has been warranted. This is not to say, however, that an EAP is a bad thing. EAPs can be a very important component to an agency's wellness program. Increasingly, EAPs are focusing on prevention (Overman, 2009). EAPs and wellness committees should be working together to promote services and reach employees.

It is important that agencies keep in mind what services they want their EAP to provide. Choosing the cheapest EAP will likely restrict the coverage available to family members or the number of sessions that an employee can get (Overman, 2009). Law enforcement EAPs should

provide coverage for everyone in the household, be available at all hours of the day throughout the year, and be staffed by personnel familiar with the needs specific to the occupation. The EAP should be able to address problems relating to health, family, finances, addiction, and stress.

EAPs are just the first step to a mentally healthy workplace. Dr. David Ballard of the American Psychological Association stresses that it's important to prevent problems from cropping up in the first place by creating and maintaining a supportive and flexible environment (as cited in Overman, 2009). Good communication at all levels is a key component to understanding what is going on in the workplace. This communication will not occur unless employees feel there is a genuine concern for wellness.

Peer support programs is another option for law enforcement agencies. The programs implemented in Arizona and New York City have both demonstrated much benefit to the agencies involved. These types of programs may not be well-suited to each agency and that is something that will need to be considered by agency leadership. In smaller agencies that don't have the resources or staff to devote to a program of this magnitude it may be possible to provide at least some level of recognition training to an officer just to assist in the promotion of existing remedies such as the EAP.

Alcohol and other drug counseling is another element of health that encompasses physical and mental health. Whether one views it as a dietary issue, a psychological or physical addiction, or as a method of coping with mental stresses, drug use and drug addiction must receive attention from the wellness program. Laws and safety must be a concern for any agency but at the same time, officers must feel at least some level of confidentiality before they will

expose their problems for remedy. In order to be effective in prevention, the wellness program must work to eliminate any stigma in seeking help (Church & Robertson, 1999).

A wellness program should instruct officers on methods of coping with the stress they have and preparing for the stresses they will face. Much of this is done through education and healthy living where a physically fit body is more capable of handling stress than one that is already suffering from disease or deficiencies. EAPs provide counseling services and education to reduce familial stress and financial stress and education aids officers in achieving adequate amounts of quality sleep. Along with these efforts there are other methods of actively working to reduce stress. One of these methods is the use of learned breathing.

Breathing is one of the basic needs of the human body's metabolic process. It provides the oxygen necessary for high-energy chemical bonding throughout our body (Travis & Ryan, 2009). At the same time, breathing is one of the basic methods our body uses to purge itself of impurities and chemical waste. Breathing is especially interesting in stress reduction methods because it is a function of the body that can be regulated and have enormous effects on the rest of the body. For example, slowing one's breathing and taking deep, full breaths can directly and rapidly affect heart rate and mental state.

Breathing techniques, and the use of breath control in relaxation are no longer the sole privilege of spiritual adepts or yogis, these practices are being adopted and taught increasingly by groups (Travis & Ryan, 2009). Large companies, educational consultants, medical communities, and industrial groups are all incorporating breathing and meditation into workshops for stress management for employees because these techniques work. Breathing techniques and meditation are also catching on in the military where it is being used to combat

the effects of PTSD and stress in general (Rochman, 2009; Johnson, 2010). Already the military is seeing the advantage to teaching these techniques early on and tapping into the preventive aspects of the technique (Rochman, 2009). These techniques not only have the potential to provide law enforcement agencies with a strong tool in combating existing and future stress, they do so without requiring special equipment or facilities.

Implementation

Implementing a wellness program will not be as easy as cutting and pasting a policy. The program must be realistically formatted to fit the agency. The program must be suited to the needs of law enforcement; an environment full of unique stressors and scheduling related issues that create the need for a customized approach. The program must be one that is legally defensible, challenging, rewarding, effective for all employees, and still meet the goal of creating a healthy environment. Finally, any program must be financially feasible. This section will discuss some of the consideration of implementing an ideal wellness program.

First of all, wellness starts at the top (Overman, 2009). Senior leadership and management within the agency must commit themselves to full participation in any wellness program. Agency leaders must believe in the importance of the program for employees to embrace the concept (Shell, 2005). Participation by management shows employees that the program has been deemed important enough where employees at every level are expected to participate. It demonstrates a level of care and concern about officers and may help to reduce some of the inherent suspicion that is so frequently present in law enforcers and help to overcome some of the resistance that can come from employee groups (Shell, 2005).

Senior management and leadership support is the key to opening all the doors and to eventually altering the very culture of the organization (Overman, 2009). These are the people that will set the policies and practices of the agency. They will be deeply involved with gaining and maintaining funding for programs and they have the influence necessary to impact wellness training at the most basic level of training: the law enforcement academy. Management should be educated in legal concerns, budget, and policy and procedure (FitForce, 2010). Management has the ability to team with or influence human resource personnel, union leaders, training academy staff, certification personnel, and other professionals that can lead to occupational significance for wellness (Shell, 2005). Management will be the source of tying wellness to the career.

Although most law enforcement academies currently require some physical fitness training, these physical training components do not always adhere to exercise science practices nor do they necessarily link physical fitness to the skills needed for the job (Shell, 2005). The law enforcement community should put an emphasis on wellness and fitness training at the entry-level that will carry over into the career. Shell (2005) suggests one way of doing this is to design the exercise prescriptions to be linked directly to the physical demands of the occupation. Fitness assessments and testing protocols all correspond to standards obviously applicable to law enforcement.

While most agencies already require some medical clearance and some agencies require agility tests or physical fitness tests be completed during the hiring process, wellness is not typically focused on in the early years of the profession (Mattos, 2010). The early years of the career is an impressionable time. Managers must make an effort to impress upon new employees

that emotional fitness and wellness are as important as the excitement that new officers are drawn to (Mattos, 2010). Health and wellness need to be directly tied to professional prowess and professional success.

One of the early steps to implementation is a health screening and fitness assessment. A health screening clears participants for further participation (FitForce, 2010). The fitness assessment provides an understanding of where participants are and helps with the formulation of goals. FitForce (2010) states that a high number of agencies that have conducted health screenings have identified at least one employee in need of a medical referral, often resulting in live saving intervention. In addition to saving a life, this is a great way to set the tone and state the significance of a lifestyle changing wellness program.

Selecting a wellness coordinator is an important step. Some large agencies are able to bring in full-time fitness coordinators. Smaller departments have contracted with fitness specialists to provide part-time assistance (Panos, 2010). FitForce (2010) suggests a cost effective method of capitalizing on internal resources and perhaps partnering with other agencies to contract outside sources. Training for health and fitness coordinators is available through private and public sources including the Cooper Institute, Northwestern, FitForce, Institute for Aerobics Research, and the American College of Sports Medicine (FitForce, 2010; Panos, 2010). Assigning unqualified trainers could be detrimental to not just the program but to the workforce and lead to injuries or even death (Shell, 2005).

Public service agencies often desire unsupervised programs over supervised programs because they are less costly (Boyce & Hiatt, 1992). Simply encouraging wellness and trusting that employees will do it on their own presents the least expensive option for implementation but

likely will not produce the same moneysaving benefits or improvements in health that a supervised program will. Providing supervision is an important part of the implementation and of the program. At least one study has demonstrated that unsupervised programs have little effect on cardiovascular health and other significant areas of wellness (Boyce & Hiatt, 1992).

St. Paul, MN Police Department emphasizes that their agency requires mandatory fitness testing, but not mandatory standards (Panos, 2010). This required evaluation provides an opportunity to evaluate an officer's current status and allows for an individual exercise prescription to be developed and provided. Focusing the wellness program on participation rather than results may lessen the chance that the program is seen as discriminatory, too (Overman, 2009). Panos (2010) says that there are some unfit officers that begrudgingly appear each year for the test only because it's required, but even for them, the testing sometimes is enough to help them realize that getting fit makes sense.

Even with mandatory testing, there are many ways that an agency can encourage participation in a wellness program. Overman (2009) says that it's human nature that most people will require added incentive to move out of their comfort zone and change behaviors. Incentive ideas include things such as raffle tickets for every four hours of physical activity, reward points for participation in various wellness training sessions, and even cash rebates on insurance programs (Overman, 2009). Positive reinforcements lead to positive results (Shell, 2005). Of course, it's very important that these incentive start off simple and that the organization not try too much the first year. A department using fitness as a factor in evaluation of employees for promotion, reassignment, and reclassification provides additional incentive for officers to maintain reasonable fitness levels (Boyce & Hiatt, 1992). St. Paul Police uses the

annual fitness test in the yearly performance evaluation of officers. Failing the test (after a three month retest) can remove an officer from consideration for special assignments such SWAT or K9 (Panos, 2010).

One of the most important contributions that administrators can make for the continued support of the program is in providing on-duty training time for the program (FitForce, 2010). Providing paid time can significantly impact participation and adherence to the program. This can be accomplished with even small portions of time such as 30 minutes prior to shift just to increase incentive.

There are many factors that are necessary for a successful wellness program. At a minimum the program should consist of stress management, physical fitness, mental and psychological health, nutrition, and drug dependency education and treatment. Perhaps just as importantly is the implementation of the program. As discussed, creating an atmosphere of support and participation at all levels and tying wellness to the career are vital to success.

V. Summary and Conclusion

Limitations

One of the limitations involved with trying to advocate for a comprehensive wellness program is the lack of sound figures of cost. There are many sources that suggest that effective wellness programs more than pay for themselves through reduced costs for such things as health care and absenteeism. This way of thinking has been put forth in regard to law enforcement-specific programs as well as programs in corporate America. Nevertheless, it is difficult to point out solid figures or estimates of cost. There are figures that describe the costs of an on-duty heart attack in law enforcement and discuss the costs of absenteeism in America but applying these costs more specifically may need to be done by individual agencies.

The problem of estimating cost is further complicated because many wellness programs are not single package programs. One aspect of the program, for example the EAP, might be tied to health insurance costs while another component (i.e.. physical fitness) might be funded separately. This makes determining the overall cost of the program difficult.

Additionally, as the study by Church and Robertson (1999) demonstrates, many agencies have some components of a wellness program but not all. How much benefit would that agency gain by adding the missing aspects of the program? Would the two components provide a cumulative improvement, an overlapping improvement, or perhaps even an exponential improvement to wellness? Without further research it is difficult to say.

One final limitation is the variation in agency size. Law enforcement agencies vary in size from thousands and thousands of employees (NYPD with more than 34,500 uniformed officers) to departments of one or two officers. It would be impossible to suggest any one

program that would be suitable for all departments. For this reason, it is important that each agency develop its own goal for the program and then realistically assess the situation and develop a personalized program to help achieve that goal. This paper helps provide some of the components of an ideal program, realizing that that is not attainable in every circumstance.

Conclusions

Law enforcement is an important part of our society. Officers respond to a wide variety of calls and problems on a daily basis. This means staffing 24 hours a day, seven days a week all year long. Law enforcement can be detrimental to health in many ways. From interrupted sleep schedules and poor diets, to long periods of sedentary followed by extreme high pressure and physical activity- law enforcement includes it all. In addition to the acute stress associated with traumatic and dangerous calls, there is also the cumulative stress that builds throughout the career.

All of these negative health factors take a toll on officers as evidenced through statistics that point to the overall high levels of heart disease, premature death, and suicide of law enforcement. America, in general, and law enforcement specifically have put increased emphasis on health and wellness. Still, the number of agencies that provide comprehensive wellness programs for their employees remains much to few.

Comprehensive wellness programs account for physical and mental health components. A wellness program is developed with the understanding that issues such as physical fitness and stress management are closely tied and are both deserving of attention. Addressing the wellness of law enforcement officers can end up saving the agency and therefore the community money

through reduced healthcare costs, reduced absenteeism, and increased productivity and effectiveness. There is of course an additional expectation of health and fitness placed on law enforcement by those who rely upon them to respond to even the most demanding emergencies.

Currently, too few agencies provide employees with wellness programs that address the existing needs. Law enforcement management must work to develop and implement wellness programs that fit their agency. Through planning, participation, and incentives, managers can produce life-changing effects in the lives of at least some of their employees. These benefits not only bring with them financial benefits and increased production, they are the right thing to do for those that serve.

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