



Shift

First to Respond, Last to Seek Help: Mental Health and First Responders

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First Responder Mental Health



Line of Duty Deaths & Suicide

(high probability underreported)

F: +38%
LE: +31%

34.6% higher rate of suicide than the general population (2018)

First Responders: 2nd highest rate by Professional Occupation

#2

F: +35%
LE: +43%

2018: LE: 159 Suicides; 145 LODD

2019: LE: 228 Suicides; 132 LODD

2020: LE: 172 Suicides; 378 LODD

2018: FF/EMT: 103 Suicides; 64 LODD

2019: FF/EMT: 139 Suicides; 62 LODD

2020: FF/EMT: ~110 Suicides; 96 LODD

The World Today

In U.S., Confidence in Police Lowest in 32 Years. ¹ 18% of Americans have very little or no confidence in police.

8/10

More than 8/10 of police officers say the public does not understand the risks & challenges of their job.²

2/3 of officers perceive that the fatal police shootings that prompted demonstrations are isolated incidents.²

2/3

48%

48% Confidence in Police: Lowest ever measured: Dominated by higher highs & Lower lows³

1. Gallup study, 2017 <https://news.gallup.com/poll/183704/confidence-police-lowest-years.aspx>

2. Pew Research Center Survey (<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2017/01/11/behind-thebadge/>)

3. Forbes/Gallup Poll 2020

Law Enforcement Today

Seattle: 1400 Sworn down to 1080: 180 left in 2020, 66 YTD 2021

+18%

Resignations: Up year over year²

Dramatic decreases in hiring for large departments;
dramatic increases in smaller departments



45%

45% Increase in Retirements³

1. Gallup study, 2017 <https://news.gallup.com/poll/183704/confidence-police-lowest-years.aspx>

2. Pew Research Center Survey (<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2017/01/11/behind-thebadge/>)

3. Forbes/Gallup Poll 2020/policeforum.org



Shift Work

Sleep
Deprivation

Inadequate
Training

Technical
Problems

Bad
Crews

Malicious
Coworkers

Inconsistent
Policies

Those
Bad Calls

Poor
Leadership

The Annoying Nine

Fire, EMS, Dispatch

*Linda Willing

Inside Versus Outside



WHAT COMMAND CAN FEEL LIKE



WHAT COMMAND SHOULD ALWAYS LOOK LIKE

The Terrible Ten



Line-of-duty
death



Suicide of
colleague



Serious
line-of-duty
injury



Disaster /
Multi-casualty
incident



“Not saving”
Someone



Significant
events involving
children



Prolonged
incidents
especially with
loss of life



Personally
threatening
situations



Events with
excessive
media interest



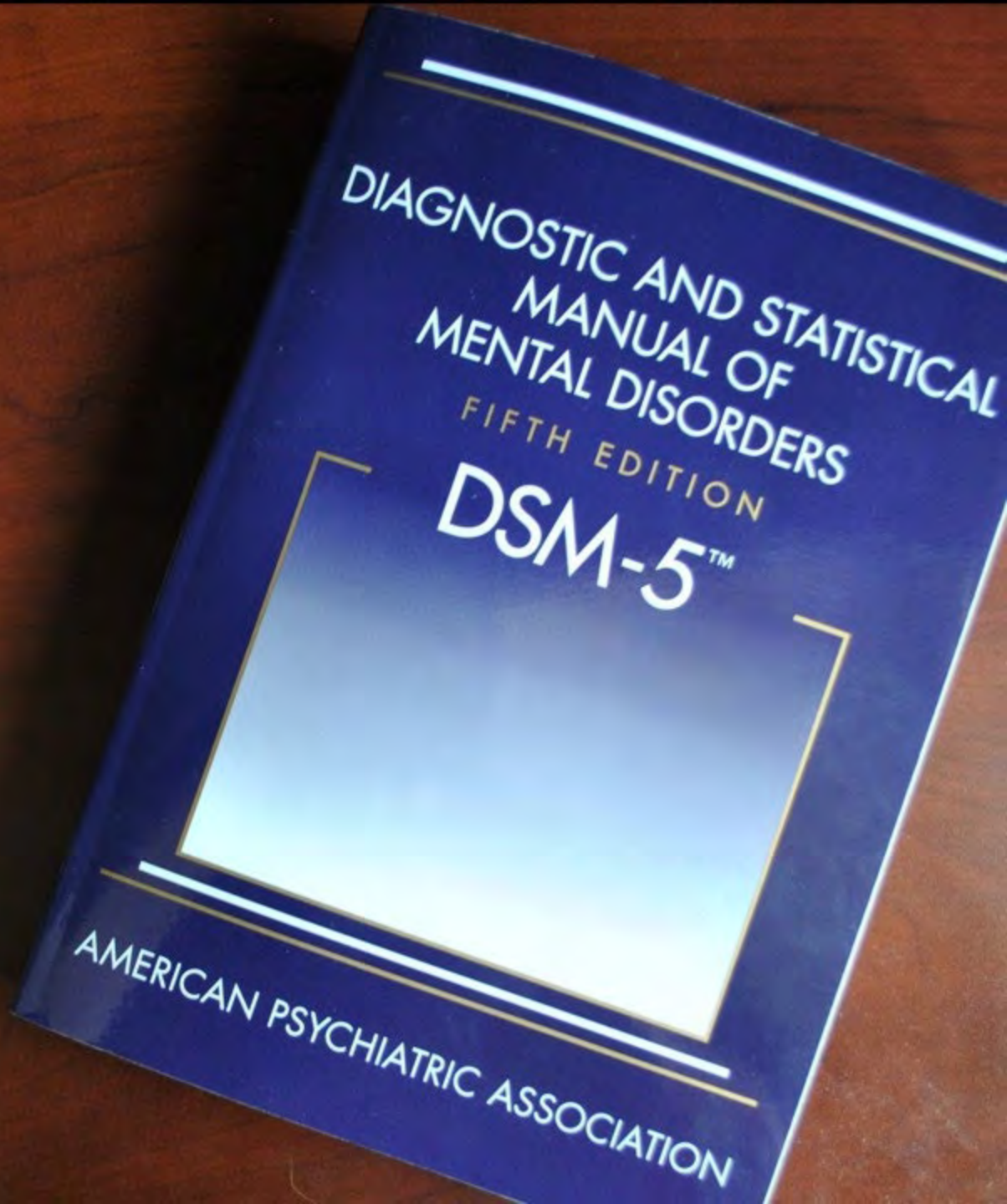
Any highly
distressing
event

Overworked And Underserved (Continued)

- Protective service occupations **have the highest incidence rate of occupational injuries and illnesses than any other occupation.**
- For police officers and sheriff's patrol officers: **violence accounts for over 50% of occupational injuries and illnesses** (including mental health and trauma).
- For firefighters, over 55% of incidents are caused by **overexertion and bodily exhaustion.**¹

Dispatchers and Telecommunications:

- **24.6%** of 808 telecommunications from through the US acknowledged symptoms consistent with **PTSD.**
- **54.7%** of 911 TCs are obese
- **24%** acknowledge symptoms consistent with a diagnosis of **Major Depression.**²



The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association, Fifth Edition (DSM-5, 2014) defines a traumatic event as a stressor in which:

- A. The person has experienced, witnessed, or been confronted with an event or events that involve actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of oneself or others.
 - I. Experiencing, witnessing, close friend/family, repeated/extreme exposure to aversive details
- B. Intrusion Symptoms
- C. Avoidance Symptoms
- D. Negative thinking and mood
- E. Arousal & reactivity:
 - I. Irritability/anger outbursts, reckless/self-destructive, hypervigilance, startle response, problems with concentration, sleep issues

1st Responder Job Description?

Post Traumatic Stress Injury

Are an unconscious, automatic, physical and emotional reaction(s) brought on by a delayed reaction to severe physical and psychological experiences that are outside the normal human range of emotions.

- ✓ Veterans of combat are the most publicized group of sufferers.
- ✓ ANYBODY can be affected by PTS(I): Law enforcement officers; firefighters; emergency medical personnel; survivors of life-threatening accidents, fire, flood or natural disasters; victims of violent crime; and victims of domestic, child or sexual abuse can and do suffer from PTS(I).
- ✓ Even family members and friends of those who have PTS(I) can suffer from what is called Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder (STSD). It is believed that 7-8% of the population have PTSD at some point in their lives, while 20-30% of First Responders experience it.
- ✓ Signs and symptoms of PTS(D) usually show up within 3 months of a traumatic event. However, for some, PTS(D) signs may not occur until years afterwards. Symptoms may come and go.
- ✓ Usually, more symptoms become apparent during times of higher stress or when experiencing symbolic reminders of the event(s). These reminders might be something remembered, something seen, something heard or even something smelled.

I BROUGHT HOME MORE FRUSTRATION
BAGGAGE FROM THE FIREHOUSE.
WHERE SHOULD I PUT IT?

COMBS
©2019
DRAWN BY FIRE
FIRE ENGINEERING



First Responder Families: When The Protector Is Gone



POLICE FAMILY IDENTITY

- Negative Stereotypes
- Don't tell them I'm a cop...
- Tell them we're Canadian



SECONDARY TRAUMA

- Trauma experienced by the first responder is passed to spouse and children, tough culture brought into home

Brain signals and chemical reactions used to keep someone safe can be toxic for the brain!

STRESS INCIDENTS ICS:

Amygdala – Lookout in the field → Dispatch →

Hypothalamus – 1st Alarm

Pituitary – Verification with the Chief – Quality Control (Committees)

Adrenals – Station/Team - Stress Chemicals – Responders, Tools, Tactics

STRESS CHEMICALS:

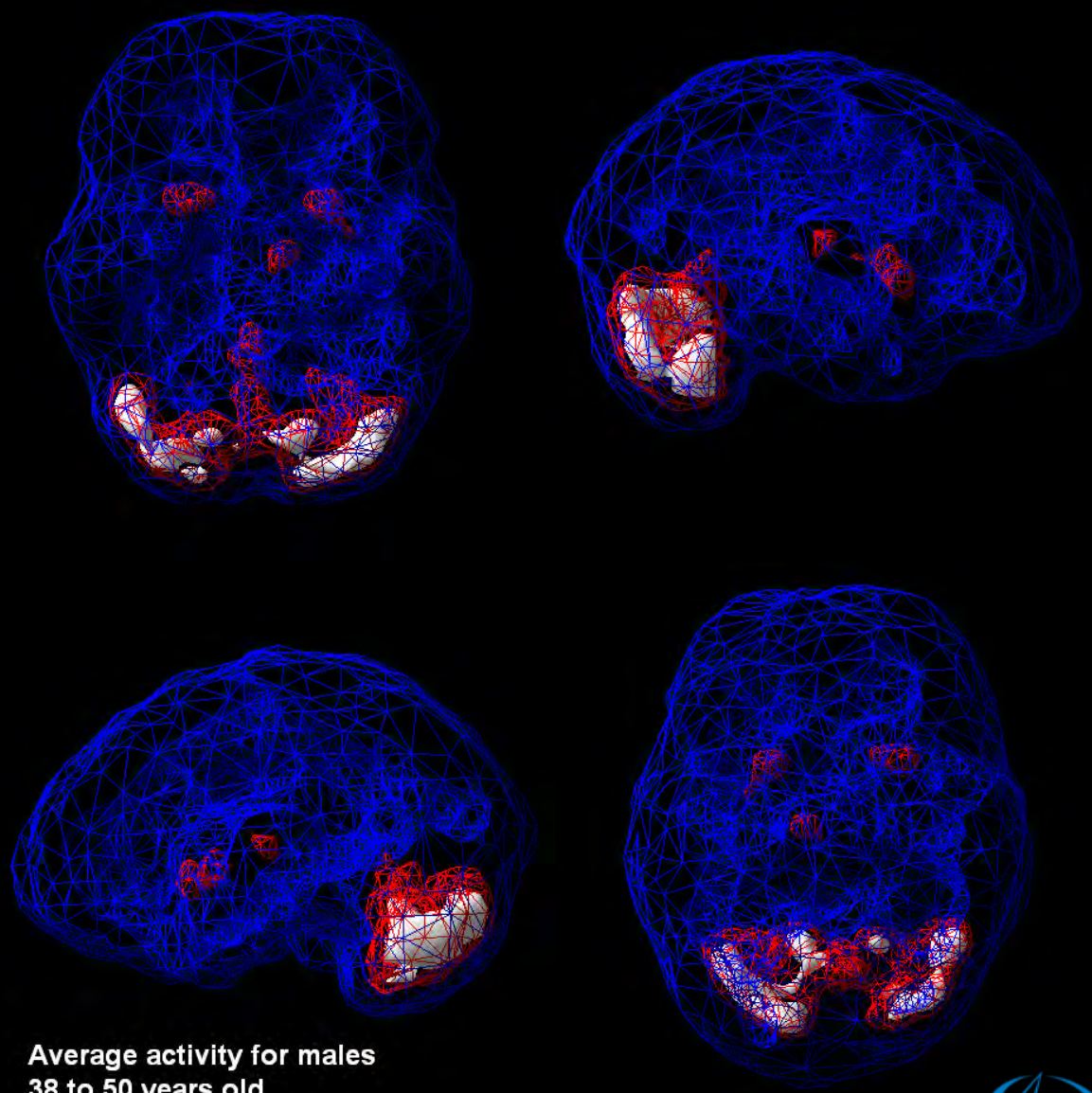
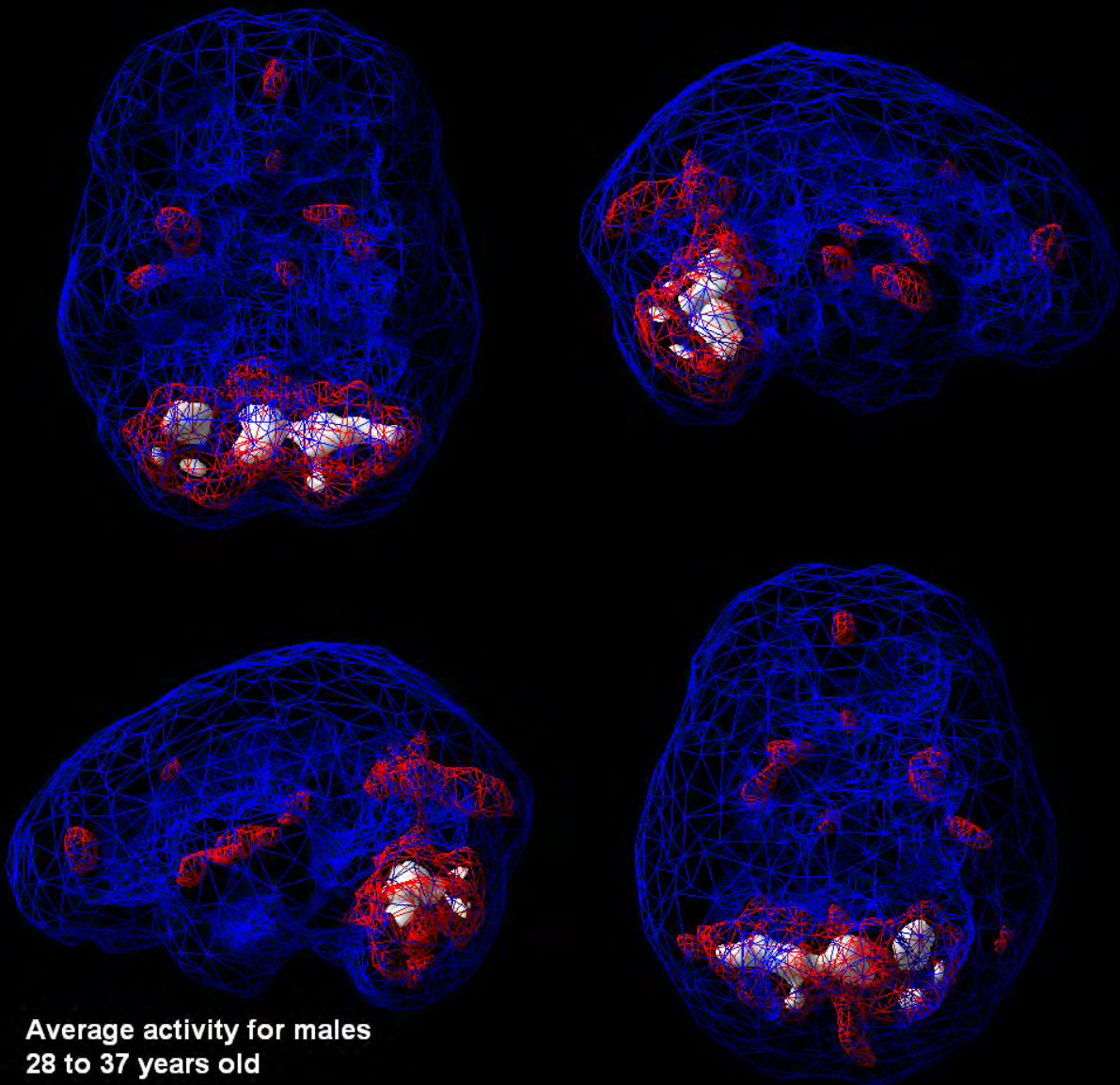
Adrenaline – 1st Alarm. (Amygdala → Hypothalamus → Adrenals)

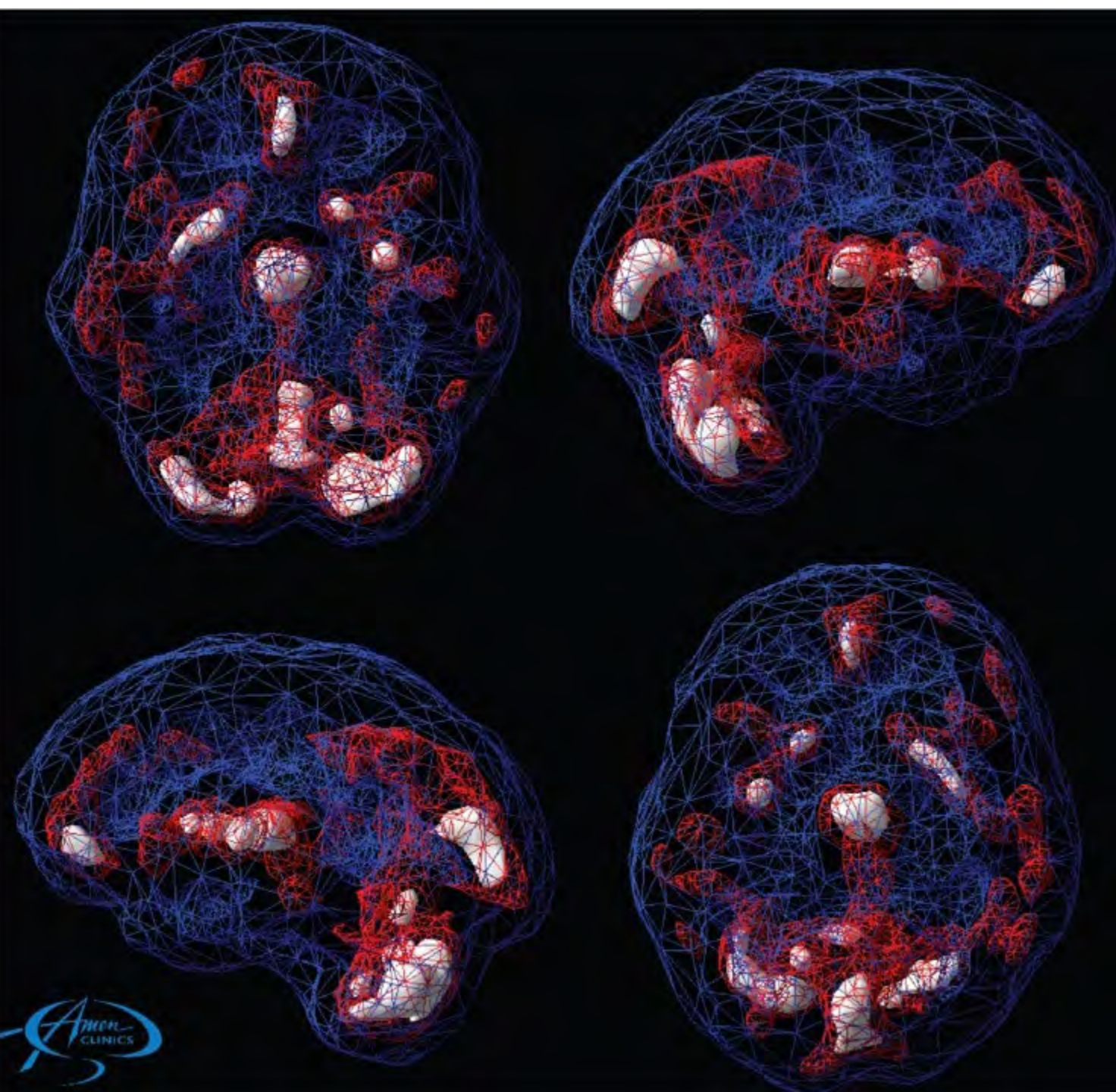
Norepinephrine – 2nd Alarm

Cortisol (stress hormone) – Ambulance, Hospital Stabilization, and Discharge
(Amygdala → Hypothalamus → Pituitary → Adrenals)

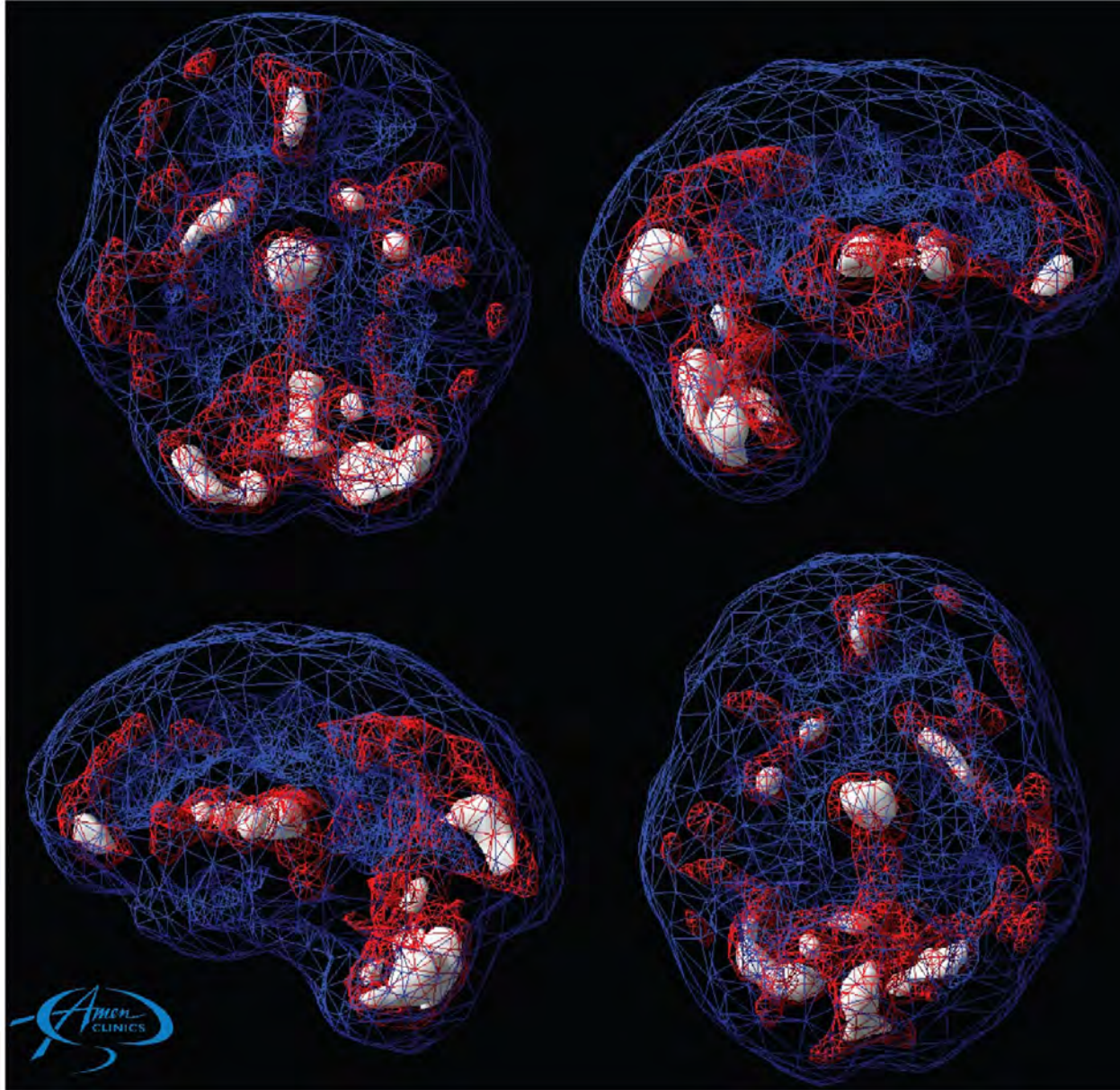
- **Adrenaline**- the mega surge increases encoding of implicit memory. which is: emotional memory (fear of dog attacking me), perceptual memory (imprinting of the perception) and procedural memory (encoded actions) and bodily sensation (feeling in the body of the bite)
- **Cortisol (stress hormone)** - blocks the hippocampus (memory and emotion regulation center) and shrinks it when released over extended periods of time. is neurotoxic for a developing brain and can inhibit making new synaptic connections, destroys healthy synapses, kills neurons and damages the region overall.







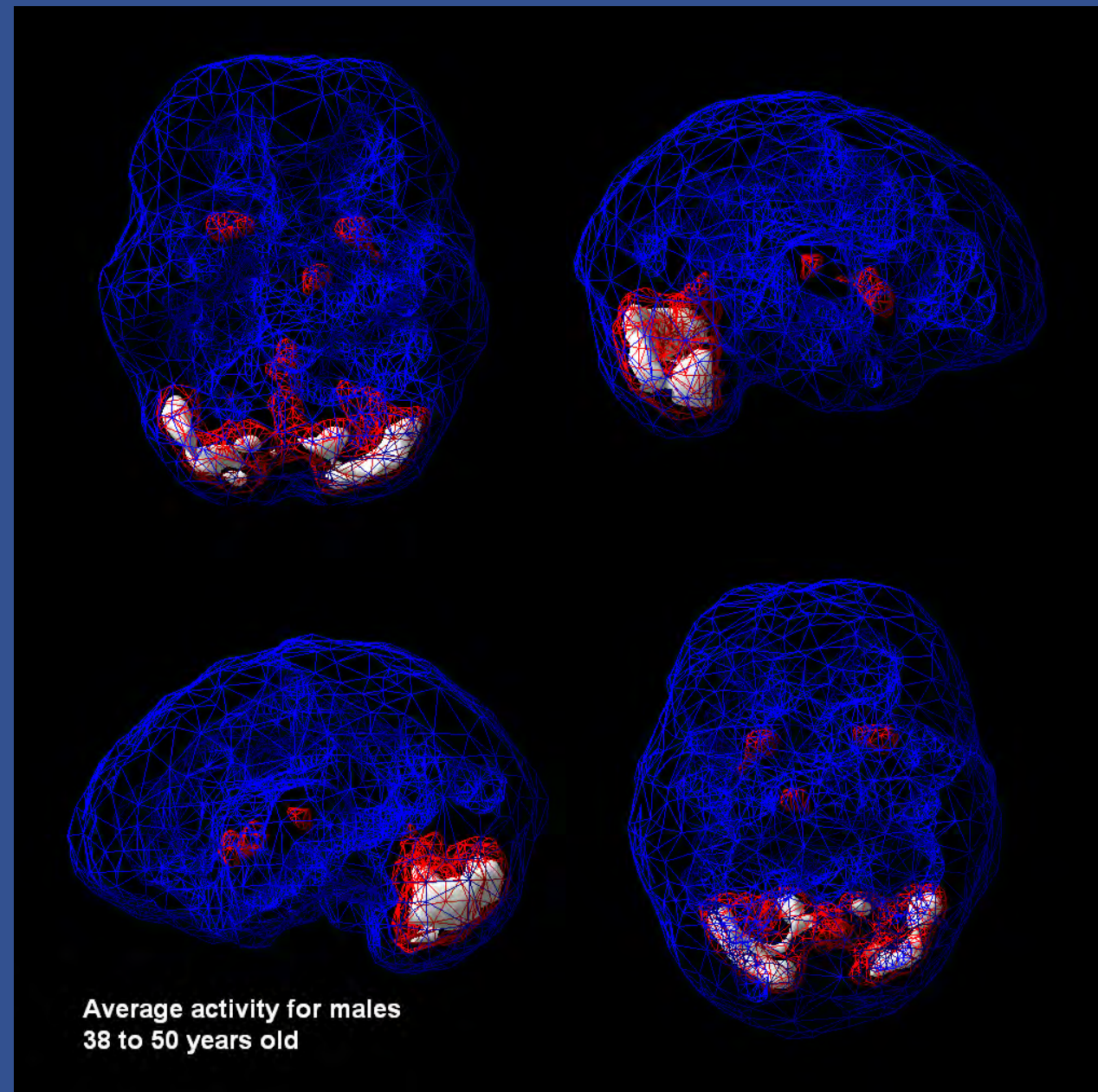
PTSD Brain-Diamond Pattern



PTSD Diamond

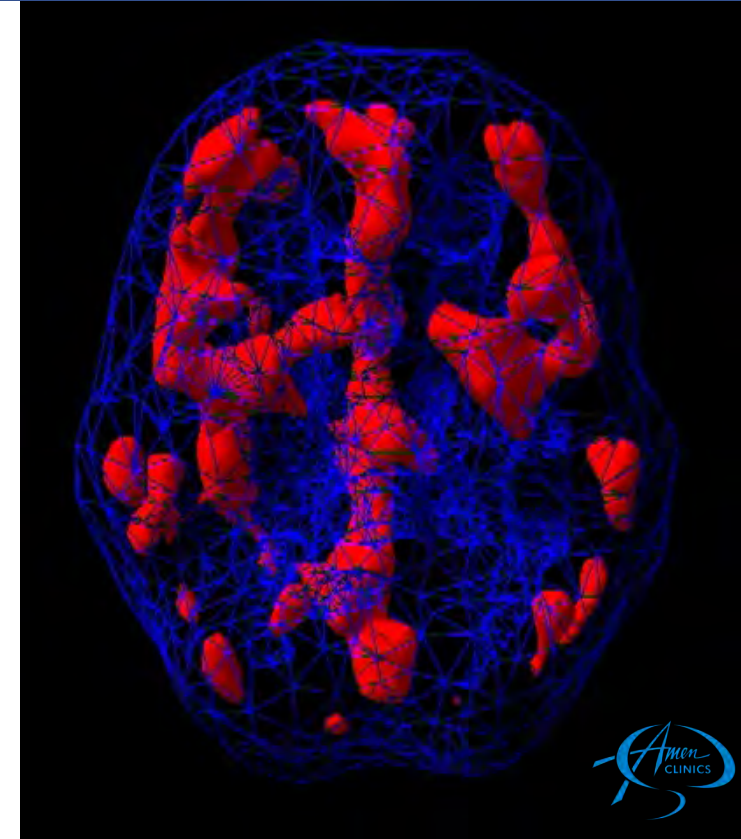
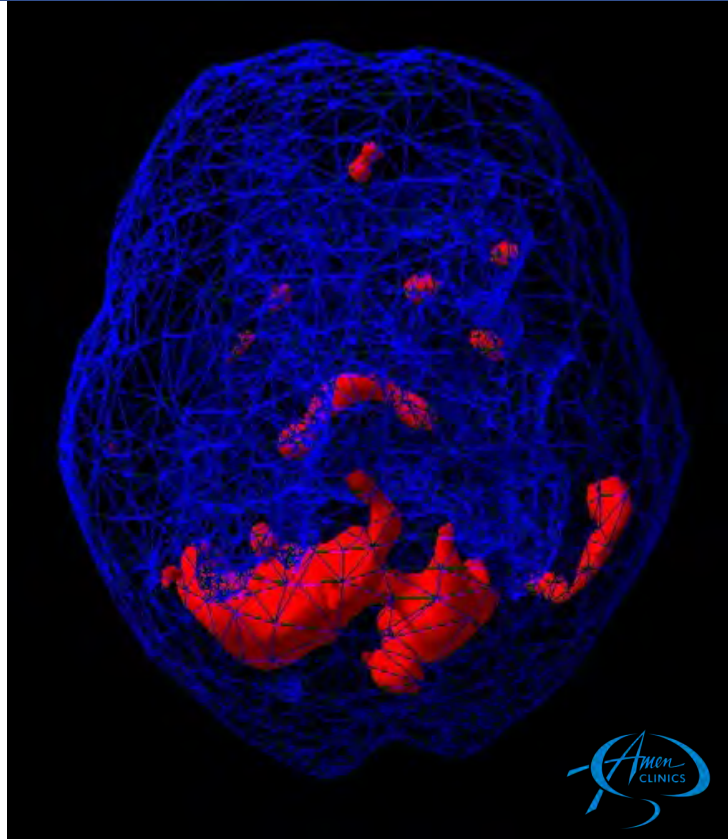


Normal



Average activity for males
38 to 50 years old

Healthy Versus OCD (Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder)



Post Traumatic Stress Injury

The following behavior/reactions are some effects of PTSD (not a complete list, each person reacts differently, and reaction differ due to the source of the trauma):

- ✓ Flashbacks, or reliving the traumatic event(s) for minutes or even hours
- ✓ Feelings of shame or guilt
- ✓ Having upsetting dreams about the event(s)
- ✓ Trying to avoid thinking or talking about the event(s)
- ✓ Feeling emotionally numb
- ✓ Irritability or anger
- ✓ Poor relationships
- ✓ Self destructive behavior - use of drugs or drinking too much
- ✓ Feeling hopeless about the future
- ✓ Having trouble sleeping
- ✓ Memory problems
- ✓ Trouble concentrating
- ✓ Being easily startled or frightened
- ✓ Not enjoying activities that once were enjoyed
- ✓ Hearing or seeing things that aren't there



Victims of the Profession

- On duty the First Responder presents as: alive, alert, energetic, involved and humorous
- Off duty the First Responder presents as: tired, detached, isolated and apathetic, , or needing excessive stimulation
- The failure to cope in a healthy way leads to finding unhealthy coping mechanisms, of which substance use and substance abuse is most common.

ABCDE's of Addiction: I See it Daily – Doesn't Look like me.

Addiction is characterized by:

- a. Inability to consistently Abstain;
- b. Impairment in Behavioral control;
- c. Craving or increased “hunger” for drugs or rewarding experiences;
- d. Diminished recognition of problems;
- e. A dysfunctional emotional response.

✓ **BioGenetics: In the blood:** Frequency, Pattern, Quantity

✓ **Psychological Self-Medication**

✓ **Socio-Cultural Norms (Imperatives?!)**

Mental Health in the US Workplace

Current State

40%

of working-age adults experience a mental health challenge each year

80%

of employees state that workplace stress affects their personal relationships

60%

of adults don't seek treatment

2 in 5

adults in America experience a mental illness

2 in 3

people worldwide suffer from depression or anxiety

More days are lost to absenteeism due to mental health than to other illness or injury. It is the leading cause of disability.



Culture & Stigma Of First Responders

First Responders experience more acute stress and trauma than the general population.



Of FR experience symptoms of Mental Health Issues



Are prevented from seeking treatment due to culture and stigma of their job.



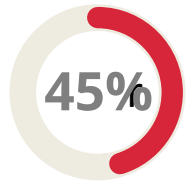
First Responders have twice the rate of alcoholism as the general population

*University of Phoenix, 2017

Culture & Stigma Of First Responders (Continued)



Of FR say their supervisor will treat them differently if they bring up a MH issue at work



Say talking about MH at work will make them appear “weak” to peers



Say bringing up MH concerns at work will prevent being considered for promotion



Barriers To Seeking Assistance

“Suck it Up”

The overall culture of First Responders is to be tough. Historically first responders have been encouraged to get over things quickly because they have duties they need to perform.

“Feelings: The F Word”

It’s a sign of weakness to bring up trauma, talk about how a traumatic day at work has affected them. Many First Responders fear losing face.

Distrust in the Community

Many First Responders fear seeking help due to the distrust that exists between the media, the public and first responders (specifically Police officers).

Fear of criticism, confidentiality and other negative consequences



Leadership Mental Wellness Challenges

Public Perception

The City Council, Board,
etc.

Fire Culture

The Union

Stigma

Head Count

Trust

Fire Culture

Funding/Budget

Liability

My Own Beliefs

Fill in the blank _____

Public Perception

Leadership & Wellness:

Fill in the blank _____

The Chief Mantra

"The City Council, Board, etc.)"

Fire Culture

Fire Culture

the job done safely



Provide a Clear Path

The Union

Trust

Stigma



Provide a Clear Path

Head Count



Obtain & Deploy Resources

Trust

Obtain & Deploy Resources



Reduce Injuries & Liability

Liability



Self Assess, Improve, Continue

My Own Beliefs

Funding/Budget

Fire Culture

Leadership & Wellness:

How Do We Get Our People Help?

- Wellness Adoption/Cultural Change:**
 - Use Informal Leaders/Influencers for department buy-in

- All Stakeholders Participate**

- Behavioral Care System in Place:**
 - Peer Support (Trusted & Effective)
 - CISD/CISM
 - Time Off, Benefits Treatment Options
 - Culturally Competent EAP & Clinicians
 - Behavioral Care Helpline
 - Normalized Health & Wellness Program
 - Train on Brain Health vs Mental Health
 - Include the family
 - Maintain Awareness

Needs in First Responder Communities



Training for FR organizations

- Mental Health Symptoms
- Change in culture
- Opening the door for communication
- Designing Behavioral Health Access Systems



Internal Process Groups and Debriefs

- Critical Incident Groups
- Support for Dispatchers, too...
- Resiliency building
- Peer support



Therapists and Programs need to be proactive

- Intentional with building reputation
- Meet FR where they are
- Immerse in FR culture

Current Resources For First Responders



✓ Peer Support Groups

✓ Critical Incident Debriefings

✓ Culturally Competent EAPs. (III-A)

✓ FR (Only) PTSD & Substance Abuse Treatment

✓ Departmental Peer Support

✓ Associations

First Responder Wellness: Mind, Body, Spirit and Family



First Responder Consulting & Training:

Behavioral Health Topics Include:

PTSI, Resiliency, Alcohol/Substance Abuse, Mental Health, Leadership, Families, Suicide Prevention & more

Behavioral Care Access System Development

Sage Retreats: First Responder Spouses/Partners

R&R Retreats: Peer Support Teams

Janus Retreats: Trauma & Resilience

www.shiftwellness.com

949.287.3369

First Responder (Only) Treatment

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Post Traumatic Stress | Depression | Anxiety | Alcohol and Other Substances

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INTENSIVE OUTPATIENT

IN-NETWORK WITH MOST PAYERS, INCLUDING WORKERS
COMPENSATION

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