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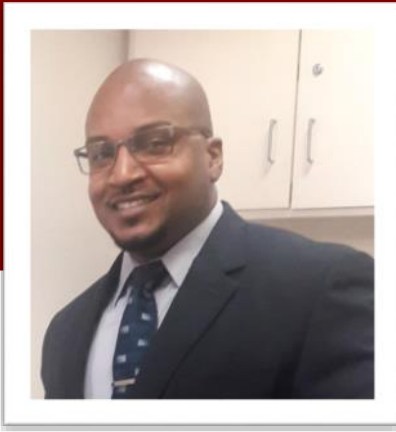


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International Law Enforcement
Educators and Trainers Association

Counseling Cops Thru Officer Wellness

By Kareem Puranda, LPC, LCAS



You may have heard the term; Officer Wellness. The word

officer is self-explanatory but the word wellness involves a more complex explanation. The World Health Organization defines Wellness as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being..." I would include spirituality and emotional well-being as complementary elements to overall wellness.

How are Law Enforcement Officers maintaining their overall wellness in the profession? Are they using healthy coping strategies in dealing with the nuances of administrative politics, and strained community relations? Police officers are constantly scrutinized by an unfair standard. In some states, officers are trained according to a minimum standard, yet these men and women are held to a higher standard in the public's eye. How does one perform at a higher standard when he or she is taught according to a basic training? Hence, Basic Law Enforcement Training (BLET). BLET prepares police officers with firearm training, self-defense tactics, physical training, procedures and knowledge of the law. All of these skills are essential to being a good police officer. However, the training is significantly lacking a crucial component. That component is counseling. It is erroneous to assume that because an officer completes BLET or Academy training, that they have the mental toughness that will carry them through the dangers of the job.

Without addressing the emotional and mental aspects caused by the job, other areas of wellness will be compromised. This is like having a car with a flat tire. The car will not drive effectively until the tire is fixed. How far do you think you can travel on one or more flat tires?

While the current Law Enforcement training addresses the physical and perhaps the social aspects of wellness, it is not doing enough to address the mental or emotional side for its officers. When an officer is experiencing constant stress or burnout, they may become cynical, irritable, have low morale, no energy or patience, seclude

themselves and show poor communication skills. This is a direct result of the lack of mental health training and/or counseling within the profession. The only time counseling is suggested, is usually after an officer involved critical incident. With the stress and trauma that comes with law enforcement work, why isn't more being done on a proactive level to help police officers tackle these realities? Why do we have to wait for a catastrophe before we become proactive? Isn't prevention better than cure?



Most agencies will not see this as a concern because it is not being conveyed to upper administration. Most police officers will not admit to experiencing mental health challenges for fear of being labelled unfit for duty. Just because an officer doesn't share that he or she is having mental health challenges, doesn't mean it doesn't exist. To see examples of how officers are suffering in silence, just look at the statistics. According to www.policesuicide.com, 102 police officers committed suicide in 2017. The divorce rate for law enforcement professionals is extremely high as well as the number of officers involved in domestic violence. In addition, some officers suffer with addictions such as alcoholism or drug abuse to self-medicate their emotional/mental pain. There are a host of diagnoses such as depression, PTSD, personality disorders, anxiety and acute stress that are not being addressed. This is a pervasive problem across the professions of all first responders, including the military. What clinical help is being offered to help law

Counseling...con't

enforcement officers manage their careers effectively?

Mental health is often viewed in a negative manner. But it is simply recognizing the wellbeing of your intellectual state. Counseling should be mandated not only in academy but also throughout an officer's career. Counseling will help the officer improve the emotional and social intelligence needed to cope with the daily challenges of the job. Thus, improving the officer's overall wellness.

If there are annual firearms training, and physical agility test, then there should also be annual mental health/ counseling training. This training will ensure that officers remain mentally healthy. As a result, offering counseling in any Officer Wellness program will help to improve employee morale, agency retention, reduce excessive force incidents, lessen liabilities for the Police Department and improve community relations. If you or anyone you know needs help dealing with the challenges of the job, please contact a counselor to get help.

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About the Author

Kareem Puranda is a former cop turned counselor. He is a Licensed Professional Counselor and a Licensed Clinical Addiction Specialist. His private practice offers counseling and training workshop to law enforcement officers. Kareem can be reached at www.selftalkcounseling.com, info@selftalkcounseling.com or 980-285-3689.



2020
ILEETA ★
CONFERENCE & EXPO

**MONDAY, MARCH 23RD THROUGH
SATURDAY, MARCH 28TH, 2020**

ST. LOUIS UNION STATION HOTEL
ST. LOUIS, MO

2-DAY
VENDOR
EXPO

LIVE
FIRE

MORE THAN
150 INSTRUCTOR
COURSES

HANDS-ON
& CLASSROOM

INSTRUCTOR
CERTIFICATIONS

INTERNATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT
EDUCATORS AND TRAINERS ASSOCIATION