

PERMA Members Learn About PTSD from Police Psychologists

Police and fire departments can significantly reduce the risks and costs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in police officers and firefighters by cultivating and maintaining socially supportive work environment for these municipal workers, two experts have advised representatives from nearly two dozen New York public entities.



Dr. William McIntyre (foreground) and Dr. David Kelley address an audience at PERMA headquarters on the topic of post-traumatic stress disorder. Photo: PERMA

About 20 PERMA* members gathered at PERMA's Latham headquarters March 31 for an intensive seminar from Dr. William McIntyre and Dr. David Kelley of Public Safety Psychology on the causes, symptoms, and management of PTSD in police and firefighters.

Dr. Kelley said PTSD is caused by a defect in the "flip and reset" function of those who serve in the line of duty. When police and firefighters are on duty, these men and women have to be ready to protect and fight. When they are off duty, they must flip and reset to a less vigilant mode in order to function properly in civilian life. Exposure to multiple traumatic incidents can cause a person to be less able to reset on a daily basis and more susceptible to PTSD.

Police and fire departments can assist their members' psychological health by

encouraging a socially supportive environment. A department's administration is frequently cited as the members' primary source of stress, so supervisors should be cognizant of each member's workload and should promote a peer support system.

"The message can be boiled down to three words: *You're not alone*," said Dr. Kelley.

Early detection of PTSD symptoms and intervention are key to prevention. In every aspect of a member's day-to-day life, peers and supervisors should be on the alert for abrupt shifts in behavior, and they should refer affected members to the appropriate support program as soon as possible. If this is not done or cannot be done, a member with advanced symptoms of PTSD should be removed from duty and referred to treatment.

PERMA members who attended the March 31 session by the experts from Public Safety Psychology were uniformly impressed. Evaluation comments heralded the presenters as "great" with "real life examples and experiences. Such an important topic." The size and setting of the class also drew praise: "Nice to have interaction with the class! Great facility – Glad I was able to attend!"

Last Thursday's session on PTSD was the last PERMA regional meeting until September. However, there will be eight educational workshops at the 2016 Annual Conference, May 26-27 at the Sagamore Hotel and Resort on Lake George in Bolton Landing, Warren County.

***PERMA, Public Employer Risk Management Association, Inc.**

Public Employer Risk Management Association, Inc., headquartered in Latham, is the largest workers' compensation pool for public entities in New York State, providing benefits to municipal employees for over 30 years. Over 500 municipalities have chosen PERMA to manage their claims and ensure workplace health and safety.

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