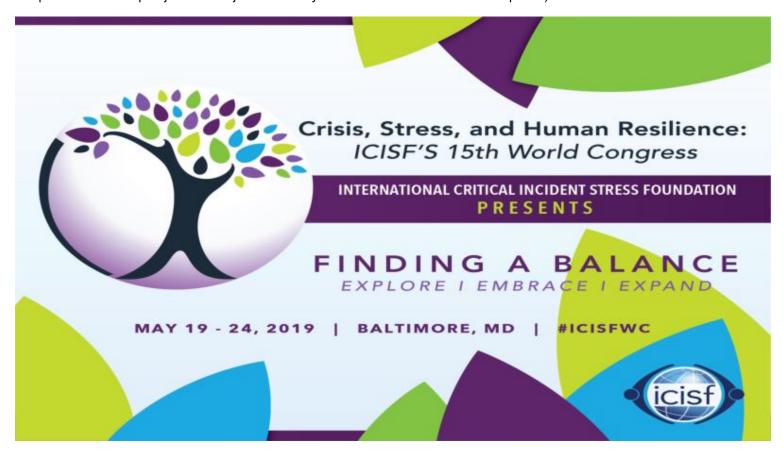


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# Alcoholism/Stress/Suicide in One of Our Own

By:

Dr. Paul J. Antonellis, Jr. Merrimack College

North Andover, MA

&

Carol Burroughs, MS, LCPC

Bozeman, MT



ICISF'S 15TH WORLD CONGRESS ON CRISIS, STRESS & HUMAN RESILIENCE IMPACTING COMMUNITIES THROUGH CRISIS INTERVENTION | FINDING A BALANCE: EXPLORE, EMBRACE, EXPAND MAY 19-24, 2019 | BALTIMORE, MD | ICISFWorldCongress.org

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#### Dr. Paul Antonellis, Jr.

- Doctor of Education, Master's Degree in Labor & Policy Studies;
- Assistant Professor Management Department, Girard School of Business, Merrimack College;
- Director of Human Resource Management Program;
- Taught more than 100 undergraduate and graduate courses over the past 10 years;
- Faculty ICISF for more than 19 years;
- · Lectured nationally and internationally;
- Authored & Published three Books and more than 40 articles;
- Peer Reviewer for three journals;
- Retired Fire Chief: 20 years in the fire/EMS field.
- 11 Years of experience part-time police officer.

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#### Carol Staben Burroughs, MS, LCPC

- Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor since 1990
- Instructor at Montana State University since 1997
- Instructor at Montana Law Enforcement Academy
- Instructor for ICISF since 1995
- Montana CISM Network
- Gallatin County CISM Team since 1991

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#### Caution!

# Subject matter covered in this course may cause unexpected personal reactions.

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#### **Course Objectives:**

- Gain insight and ideas about how to minimize and balance the traumatic effects of high risk professions.
- Possess tools to help survivors of ASD and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder recognize, understand, and manage symptoms.
- Possess the tools to help coworkers recognize, understand, and manage the affects of ASD, PTSD, alcoholism, and suicide.
- Be sensitized to the concepts of mental health, substance abuse, and suicide in high risk professions.

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#### You are NOT alone!

This program will provide a brief overview of exactly what PTSD and ASD are, including general diagnostic criteria and some brief information on related disorders. The program is NOT intended as a diagnostic tool but rather an "awareness" of what ASD, PTSD, and alcoholism is and is not, how it will affect people, coworkers, and families.





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#### **Current Issues**

- NO formal tracking system for psychological injuries & retirements.
- Debriefing services, EAP, chaplains, peer support, and mental health services.
- > Formal stress management documents.



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#### **Current Issues**

- > Stigma remains a significant problem.
- Back to work issues/concerns.
- Lack of understanding about ASD/PTSD
- > Tracking suicide: Police vs Fire Service



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#### Acute Stress Disorder and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder



While high risk professionals are at increased risk for developing PTSD as compared to the general population, there remains a cloud of uncertainty surrounding the disorder: uncertainty surrounding which reactions are normal, whether or not they should be spoken of with colleagues and family members, and when and where to seek help.



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# **NOTE!**

All of the signs and symptoms of severe

# **DYSFUNCTION**

warrant referral to a mental health professional.



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- Posttraumatic Stress survival response
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a pathological variant of that normal survival reaction (it interferes with functioning both personally and professionally)

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# What Are The Common Symptoms Of PTSD

☑ Reexperiencing/replaying

☑ Avoidance/numbing

☑ Hyperarousal



(Called Clusters)

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### **PTSD** Criteria



- Experiencing an event or being confronted with an event involving actual or threatened death or serious injury or threat to the physical well being of self or others
- · Intense fear, helplessness or horror



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- · Re-experiencing event
- · Intrusive recollections
- Recurrent dreams
- Distress at exposure to symbolic cues
- · "Flashbacks" are a red flag
- Physiological reactions to triggers





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#### PTSD #2 - Avoidance

- Efforts to avoid thoughts, people, feelings associated with event
- · Avoidance of activities related to trauma
- · Amnesia surrounding event
- · Diminished interest in normal activities
- Detachment
- · Restricted Affect
  - \*Alcohol is often used to help people avoid



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#### PTSD #3 Arousal

- Sleep Disturbances
- Anger and irritability
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hypervigilance
- Exaggerated "startle response"



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#### **PTSD**

- A. Traumatic event
- **B.** Intrusive memories
- C. Avoidance, numbing, depression
- D. Stress arousal
- E. Symptoms last >30 days
- F. Impaired functioning

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# **Predicting PTSD**

- 1) Dose: response relationship with exposure
- 2) Personal identification with event
- 3) Very important beliefs violated

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# Why Acute Stress Disorder and not PTSD?

- According to the "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders" each diagnosis requires that a person must have experienced, witnessed, or been involved in a traumatic event involving injury or the threat or death to oneself or another person.
- A person must be re-experiencing the incident (flashback episodes, recurrent images, dreams, illusions).
- The person <u>must</u> experience distress that results in interference in normal social or occupational functioning (Antonellis, Meshad, Stack 2006).

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#### **Acute Stress Disorder or PTSD**

- What separates the two is the <u>durations of the</u> <u>symptoms</u>.
- ASD can only be diagnosed if it occurs within the <u>first</u> month and it last for <u>two or more days</u>.
- PTSD can only be diagnosed if the symptoms <u>last longer</u> than a month in duration (Antonellis, Meshad, Stack 2006).

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- The "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 4<sup>th</sup> edition" issued in 2000 included ASD as a "new" diagnosis.
- Before this time a diagnosis concerning psychological trauma could only be made <u>one month or later after symptoms</u> first appeared.
- \* Insurance companies often <u>refuse</u> to pay for care if a diagnosis is not provided.

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#### Some Common Symptoms ASD & PTSD

- Repeated memories, images
- "Avoidance" of memories/people/places of the scene/incident.
- Uncontrollable anger/outbursts.
- Disturbing dreams/nightmares.
- Irritable, anger.
- Hyper-alert
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling numb to loving/caring feelings

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# **Critical Incident Stress Symptoms**

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN YOURSELF/OTHERS

**Uncontrolled Arousal** 

- □ Physical Changes
  - Anxiety, Elevated PB/heart rate, dizziness, sweating, sleeplessness, fatigue



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# **Critical Incident Stress Symptoms**

# WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN YOURSELF/OTHERS UNCONTROLLED AROUSAL

- □ Cognitive Changes
  - Memory disruption, confusion, intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, cannot "shut off" brain



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# **Critical Incident Stress Symptoms**



# What to look for in yourself/others UNCONTROLLED AROUSAL

> Emotional Changes

Fear, anger, jumpiness, tension, restlessness, agitation, anxiety, mood changes, sadness or depression, avoidance, outbursts, problems with spouse and/or coworkers, not enjoying things they used to like to do.



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# **Critical Incident Stress Symptoms**

#### What to look for in yourself/others UNCONTROLLED AROUSAL

#### **Behavioral Changes**

 Withdrawal, decreased hygiene, silence, sleeplessness



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#### Co-morbid Psychological Disorders Commonly Associated with PTSD

- Major Depression
- Substance-Related Disorders

(drugs or alcohol abuse or dependence)

High risk professionals may become depressed about feeling disconnected from their career or may turn to drugs or alcohol in an attempt to block out intrusive images or reduce the feelings of overwhelming anxiety.

(Everly & Lating, 2004; Frideman, 2001; Green & Kaltman, 2003)

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# Here are some of the signs to look for:

- Use resulting in failure to fulfill major work or home obligations
- Recurrent use in situations in which it is hazardous
- Recurrent alcohol or drug related legal problems
- Continued use despite knowledge of problems caused or aggravated by use
- Tolerance (needing more alcohol or drugs to become intoxicated)

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# Here are some of the signs to look for:

- Withdrawal
- Alcohol use for periods longer than intended
- Considerable time spent in obtaining or using alcohol or drugs, or recovering from their effects
- The discontinuation or loss of important social, work, or recreational activities because of alcohol use

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# Alcohol Use/Abuse

- Socially acceptable way to unwind
- "Reward" after days on duty
- Tolerance rises over time
- > "It was the only thing that made me feel better."
- Using as a way to feel "normal"
- > Addiction don't wait for days off to drink
- > Interference in personal and professional lives





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# Alcohol Use/Abuse

Feelings of shame about not being able to control it

Feel helpless to repair the (usually) disruptions their drinking has caused

Suicidal ideation

"Maybe they'd be better off without me"

Making plans to kill themselves

Trajectory of chemical dependence can take months to years

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### Prescription drug abuse is a major problem

- Prescription drug abuse is a major problem for those who work in high risk professions.
- The daily job activities cause injury and illness very frequently.
- Even when an high risk professional worker is prescribed drugs to take as needed, they are prone to start abusing that medication.



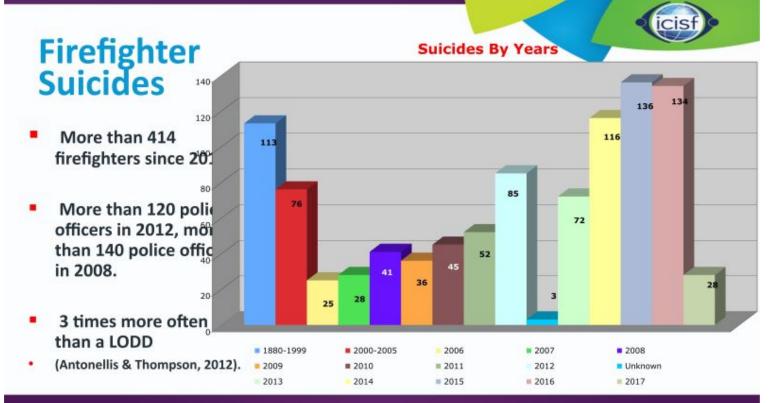
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### **At Risk Populations:**

Male

Highest rate: 15-24 y/o and over 55 y/o

Previous History Family History Severe Guilt Plan



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# Suicide

- One of the top five most difficult CISM interventions
- The CISD for suicide is more challenging than most CISDs.
- Needs experienced team members
- Follow-up is essential

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- Shock
- Early grief
- Remorse
- Anger
- Frustration
- Why, Why, Why
- But, But, But

- He / she was soooo happy
- "In my religion..."
- Resentment
- Uncertainty
- Disappointment
- Insecurity
- Guilt

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- Delayed (Surfaces Later)
- Absent (Missing Feelings & Expressions)
- Chronic (Continues as Permanent & Painful State)



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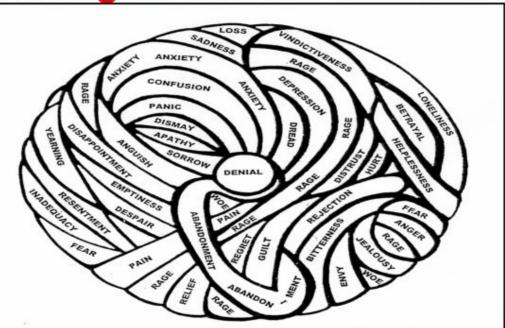
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G R I E F

# A Tangled Ball of Emotions



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# What Came First?







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#### The Chief's Office...

disorders that ultimately bring the high risk professional suffering from PTSD to the attention of the supervisor, shift command, chief, or the mental health professional.



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# **How To Help**

- Most co-workers, family members and supervisors are <u>NOT</u> trained to confront the affected firefighter.
- Seek out professional assistance on confronting the affected firefighter, <u>before</u> taking any action.
- The affected person will do everything in his/her power to avoid this topic.



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# **How to Help**

- ✓ Have any of you faced this in your departments?
- ✓ What did you do?
- ✓ Who helped?
- ✓ What were the outcomes?



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# **Natural Reactions**

- After a traumatic incident, it is common for high risk profesional to experience feelings of fear or anxiety, anger or sadness but this is <u>NOT</u> PTSD.
- Do <u>NOT</u> confuse normal feelings of anxiety, anger or sadness after a traumatic incident with having a mental illness.

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# **Natural Reactions**

- Leave it for the trained professionals to determine.
- Remember, you job is <u>NOT</u> to diagnose the person with ASD or PTSD.

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It is "natural" for the high risk professional to experience some of the symptoms of PTSD after a traumatic incident and while it is recommended that these symptoms be addressed, this does not mean they have PTSD.

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- Firefighters that develop PTSD: We need to <u>reach</u> out to them and support them in this battle to regain their emotional stability.
- With support, encouragement, and therapy affected high risk professional will go on to lead productive lives.

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# **Traditional Treatments**

"PTSD symptoms fall into three categories: intrusion, avoidance, and arousal. Traditional therapeutic approaches that have shown some success in eliminating these symptoms include **Behavior Therapy**, **Cognitive-Behavior Therapy**, and the use of medications, know as pharmacotheraphy" (Antonellis & Mitchell, 2005).

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# **Coping Strategies**





- Be Active
- Have a "Plan of Action"
- Develop a Support Network (family, friends, co-workers)
- Limit Your Exposure to Trauma
- Have a Good Belly Laugh (humor is important)





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# Coping Strategies cont.

- Seek Professional Help (licensed professional)
- Do <u>NOT</u> Make Any Major Life Changes
- Chances are that the symptoms did NOT start over night so do not expect them to STOP over night.
- Seek legal advise, if needed for employment issues.





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# **Final Thought**

As the diagnostic criteria concerning traumatic stress changes, so too will the number of HRP who meet that criteria.

Since the diagnostic criteria for ASD are less stringent, and the exposure of HRP to trauma is so great, we might expect to see higher rates of ASD among HRS, but only if the trauma is actually reported.

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# Final Thought cont.

Until we can accurately predict an individual HRP's likelihood of developing PTSD, we should assume that <u>nearly one fifth of our personnel</u> <u>may develop PTSD</u>, and we should engage in appropriate, departmental-wide "prevention efforts" in order to assist as many of them as possible (*Antonellis & Mitchell, 2005*).

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# Final Thought cont.

- The service can not afford to turn a blind eye on PTSD.
- The financial impact to the firefighter/police/EMS and the community is very costly and can be avoided.
- PTSD does not have any boundaries; it can strike full-time HRP and call/volunteer HRP, city and small towns, young and old, male or female, HRP rank up to and including chiefs.

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# Final Thought cont.

The cost of ignoring PTSD will be seen in the quality of the lives of those suffering from PTSD, from their families and loved ones, from their coworkers and their chiefs. It will also ultimately affect the community with which they work.

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