



BLASTOUT

Friday, April 08, 2011

OPP ASSOCIATION COMMENTS REGARDING OMBUDSMAN'S INVESTIGATION

Message from Interim President Jim Christie

The Association has long held the view that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a legitimate workplace injury, not unlike a broken leg or wrenched back sustained in the line of duty. It is a serious and disabling condition that too often is left undiagnosed until it presents unique and challenging characteristics.

As you all know, police work by its very nature is prone to the onset of PTSD. Dealing with violent crime scenes, tragic suicides, motor vehicle fatalities, serial murderers and a host of other traumatic incidents, accompanied by long work hours, shift work, stress, exhaustion and "burn out" all contribute to police officers unique susceptibility to the onset of PTSD. Unfortunately, the police "culture" prides itself on "sucking it up" and getting the job done. Too often, police officers suffering from the early signs of PTSD are not identified as such. Officers only come forth reluctantly. They are often hesitant to disclose their circumstance, often dismissing their situation as trouble in their personal life and are insistent that everything is under control.

Too often, it is only after the officer has "hit rock bottom" or had to seek medical attention for another reason (depression, alcoholism, anger, etc.) that a diagnosis of PTSD is forthcoming and is treatment obtained. Early identification of symptoms and provision of treatment is rare. Considerable work needs to be done to ensure symptoms are identified as early and as quickly as possible and that effective medical treatment and work accommodation plans are implemented.

PTSD has an enormous impact on any officer who suffers from the condition. The disorder can often include depression, loss of confidence, anger, frustration or extreme sadness and has enormous impact on relationships with their spouses, families, friends and colleagues.

Your Association believes that employers need to do much more to ensure that PTSD symptoms are identified and treated as soon as possible. This would include the provision of meaningful work accommodation for employees who suffer from early PTSD symptoms. The police culture

that militates against early identification or disclosure of PTSD symptoms must be changed. Too often, our employers respond to PTSD sufferers in a compartmentalized fashion that actually exacerbates matters.

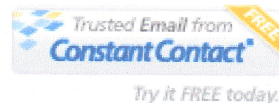
When an officer suffering from PTSD approaches the Workers Insurance and Compensation Board for assistance, the employer too often takes an adversarial position and works to deny the officer insurance coverage which further exacerbating the officer's symptoms, sense of betrayal, feelings of isolation and hopelessness. Finally, if and when an officer with PTSD is cleared to return to work, there are the additional challenges in obtaining appropriate workplace accommodation. The Association is acting in partnership with the PAO in the lobbying the Government to seek presumptive legislation for PTSD. This will result in changes to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act and will allow members who have been identified with PTSD to move through their system in an expedient manner from diagnosis, treatment and a timely recovery to return to their duties.

Police forces must develop a comprehensive approach to PTSD. Appropriate compensation should be supported not denied. Misdeeds related to the disability resulting in Police Services Act charges should be dealt with from a rehabilitative perspective rather than the current punitive approach.

Our Association is committed to work with the OPP, the Ombudsman and anyone else committed to ending the nightmare that police officers suffering from PTSD are forced to endure.

Jim Christie
Interim President
Ontario Provincial Police Association

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