

THE CISM PERSPECTIVE

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Death Notification: How NOT to deliver one

By Daniel J. McGuire, FAAETS, BCETS, CATSM

Regardless of your position within the emergency services, you will eventually be tasked with some extraordinarily difficult responsibilities. It not difficult to imagine that as Chief, Administrator or other leadership role you will be looked upon as the right choice and asked to fulfill these challenging tasks.

Without a doubt, the mere thought of having to deliver a death notification to the family of one of our staff would keep anyone up at night. Too often the skills to handle this delicate and crucial task are not taught or even mentioned in the many leadership-training courses you take as you come up through the ranks of an agency.

We have to fully realize that in the emergency services we lose a firefighter, EMT/Paramedic, or police officer each and every day. The work they do has inherent risks that simply come with the job. By choosing one of these types of careers we must appreciate and acknowledge those risks

Continued on page 2



Teaching Balance...

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

1	SPECIAL REPORT: Death Notifications; how not to deliver one
1	University Crisis Response
3	After the crisis, there are others to look out for
3	CISM related websites / Recommended reading
4	CISM Perspectives' latest training programs

University Crisis response

By Dr. Mark Lerner, FAAETS, President, AAETS

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR UNIVERSITY CRISIS RESPONSE

New York—January, 2004—The American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress (www.aaets.org) is pleased to announce availability of the only publication of its kind in the world!

Based on A Practical Guide for Crisis Response in Our Schools, with nearly 100 thousand copies in print, this new crisis response guide provides a structure and process for effectively managing the wide spectrum of university-based crises.

It is an invaluable resource in preparation for, and during, actual crisis situations and serves as a meaningful standard for our nation's colleges and universities.

University crisis response cannot be delegated solely to members of a Crisis Response Team. Today, crisis management is the responsibility of all personnel. This publication aims to empower the following individuals on campus:

- University Administrators
- Public Safety/Campus Police
- Resident Hall Directors and Resident Assistants
- Health Services Staff
- Counseling Center Personnel
- Campus Ministry/Clergy
- Communications/Media Relations Personnel
- Teaching Staff

Questions or comments may be directed to the Academy's administrative offices at (631) 543-2217.



Death Notification con't

and be as well prepared for them as we can be on an individual level and an agency-wide level.

With a line of duty death (LODD) occurring every day, we then have to look inside our agency and begin with the following statement, "It's not a matter of if, but a matter of when a LODD will strike my agency." In 2003 alone, we lost 110 firefighters, 14 EMS workers and 148 police officers.

There are a few basic skills that anyone delivering a death notification should be fully aware of and confident in the application of these skills:

- **Realize this will be the most difficult task of your emergency services career.**
- **The words you choose will be the words the family receiving this information will remember most and for the longest time.**
- **Your ability to properly deliver a death notification will directly impact that family's capacity to survive the event and the eventual move forward.**

Other issues to remember are:

- When you arrive at the home, fully identify yourself. Under no circumstances should you break this tragic news at the doorstep. Determine if the people you first meet are the family members of the injured or deceased. Ask to go inside and for everyone to sit down.
- Make and keep good eye contact with each of the family members present. This will show to the family that they have your attention and that you are being honest and genuine with them.
- Begin with a simple statement such as "I'm sorry to tell you..." or "I have some tragic news to share with you..."
- Be direct and use the words "died," "dead," and be sure to avoid phrases such as "passed away" or "is with God now." Or the one that raises my ire the most, "You've got to be strong!" Remember, those first words you say will stay with that family forever!
- Use the injured or deceased's name at all times. As hard as this may be, the family will need to hear this.
- Avoid at all costs any emergency services jargon. This specialized terminology will only confuse the family and this is not the time to have to "translate" your words.
- Allow for the family's grief and anger but be sure to protect your personal safety at all times. (I have always taught that you should keep 2 arms length between you and those you are delivering this information to.)

- Expect many, many questions. If you don't know the answers to all of them it's perfectly correct to say "I don't know but I will try to get you an answer." It's imperative that you DO NOT speculate to any answers whatsoever.
- Offer simple gestures to the family such as making any needed phone calls, transportation to the hospital, helping to arrange any immediate child care, etc.
- Be aware of differing grief expression due to the many different cultures that makes up our communities.
- Be sensitive to the diverse family structures that you can expect. Regardless of that family structure (domestic partner, common-law spouse, etc.) they all need to be treated the same with dignity and respect.

Regardless of your training and background, death notifications are never easy nor are they something that "gets easier the more you do them." With the proper training and large amounts of solemnity and consideration, death notifications *can be* done properly.

Our company has designed a **Quick Reference Card** for LODD's and death notifications. It explains how to best deliver death notifications as well as how not to do one. If you or your agency would like a complimentary copy, please contact us at 585-739-9011 or cism79@hotmail.com and we'll be glad to send one to you promptly.

As an ending note, there are three key words we teach in our LODD Pre-Planning seminars. We refer to them as the "**3 Guiding Principles**" when you respond to a LODD. Those 3 words are **Tradition, Honor and Respect**.



Check out these CISM websites!

CISM PERSPECTIVES

WWW.CISMPERSPECTIVES.COM



**International Critical Incident Stress Foundation
(ICISF) www.icisf.org**



**The American Academy of Experts in
Traumatic Stress
www.aaets.org**

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**[LINE OF DUTY DEATH PRE-PLANNING SEMINAR, APRIL 2004,](#)
[ROCHESTER, NY](#) [CALL FOR FURTHER DETAILS!](#)**



Despite some of the horrors and barbarisms of modern life which appall and grieve us, life has - or has the potential of - such richness, joy and adventure as were unknown to our ancestors except in their dreams. Arthur Holly Compton (1892-1962)

Saving lives with a difference

Richard Cranston and Syed Ahmed Mustafa, two Rochester, NY based Paramedics have teamed up to start a company focused on addressing a growing problem in the United States – Sudden Cardiac Arrest. Their company, Rent-An-AED, LLC, which launched recently, is meant to provide easy access to Automatic Electronic Defibrillators, or AEDs, to Emergency Service Agencies, businesses or even individuals.

“In the United States, you must meet several requirements prior to obtaining an AED, and then there is some training involved in its use, maintenance and, in the event it is used, in the follow-up reporting,” said Mustafa. “We plan to provide the full service. Some companies will sell you the AED and forget about you. We will help you with initial paperwork required to obtain the unit, the training, the registration, installation, **and, if needed, post-event counseling after use. This is something that no one else in New York, or even the East Coast, is doing today.**”

When asked where the idea of the company came from, Richard Cranston, Co-Founder and Partner, replied, “We see the need every day. I have been Chief Paramedic of a career EMS service in the Rochester area and Ahmed has been a Paramedic for more than 10 years and is currently the Chief Paramedic of an Advanced Life Support (ALS) agency in Northeast Monroe County. Every day he and I see what happens when people experience Sudden Cardiac Arrest (SCA) and rapid intervention is not available: People who perhaps could be saved, die. That is a shame and something both Ahmed and I want to help prevent.”

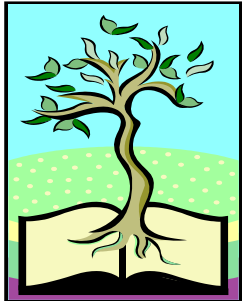
Daniel J. McGuire, President of CISM Perspectives commented, “It’s not often that a company looks at not just providing a tool for emergencies, but also is concerned what happens to that customer after a traumatic event, such as a co-worker going into cardiac arrest. It’s important to realize that after that co-worker is taken to the hospital, there are still those who witnessed the event and perhaps had hands-on involvement. They will be left to process and recover from this extremely traumatic and upsetting event often without the proper help and intervention. This happens nearly every day and these witnesses are often left to fend for themselves and that can lead to increased loss of work, loss of productivity and probable liability issues for any company or agency to deal with.”

For more information about how to obtain an AED or for any questions, contact Rich or Ahmed at www.Rent-An-AED.com or call them at 585-329-1806.

RECOMMENDED READING

UNIVERSITY CRISIS RESPONSE, EMPOWERING UNIVERSITY PERSONNEL DURING TRAUMATIC EVENTS

**BY: LERNER, VOLPE,
LINDELL, 2004**



*I hear and I forget. I see and I remember.
I do and I understand.*

*Confucius (Chinese Philosopher)
551-479 B.C.*

Are you ready for a critical incident?

When you are working with a company or consultant, it's significant to your success that you understand the services they are offering to you.

I have listed my consulting services for you below:

- Acute Traumatic Stress Management (ATSM) training
- CISM pre-education program design and presentation
- CISM Team design and establishment
- CISM Team support and continual education
- CISM pre-plan and program design
- Line of duty death (LODD) pre-plan and response program design
- Terrorism, Weapons of Mass Destruction and the CISM response
- **NEW! Motivating Emergency Responder wellness**
- **Programs flexible to your needs and budget**

**E PLURIBUS UNUM
"OUT OF MANY, ONE."**

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