

## Sleep Deprivation in First Responders-How Much of a Contributing Factor to Reported Suicide Rates?

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### Introduction

Suicide rates are estimated to be 30,000 deaths per year in the United States. Recent news stations and periodicals have been covering reporting of increased deaths by suicides of first responders in a 2016 Center for Disease Control report [1]. The first responder group of firefighters, paramedics and police officers now represents a high risk group. Within this population of suicide deaths, features of more males and use of firearms comprises the highest levels of suicides. The identified risk factors associated with first responders are marital discord, trauma, increased stress and role diffusion with the sudden fame associated with event they responded to. Additional triggers to first responders have, to date, been described as stress and loss of health. Sleep deprivation has been identified as a significant trigger factor linked to depression and suicide [2]. However, the specifics of the extent and history of the sleep deprivation as well as other factors such as mood levels are not provided in the news reporting's.

Disturbing findings of increased suicide rates amongst first responders has to be addressed. A recent literature review revealed numerous training protocols, references to WHO Preventing Suicide study and general information. However, we as Sleep Specialists, need to consider this circumstance and determine how sleep research and medicine can be of service. Early detection of sleep deprivation outcomes in behaviors such as poor concentration and attention,

errors in work performance, irritability and mood changes may be helpful. Screening tests for vigilance, attention and, at minimum reporting of sleep quality may help to identify sleep deprivation and the extent of its impact on the responder's behavior. Ideally, a health care appointment with a Sleep Specialist would provide a measured assessment of the sleep deprivation and other factors such as mood and stress level that may be influencing the responder's behavior.

What is clear from the news of the CDC report, is that intervention is needed both in terms of clinical care/assessment and for research investigations of sleep deprivation in first responders. The serious findings from the CDC study indicate immediate action on the part of Sleep specialists to provide clinical care/assessment and research investigations of sleep deprivation and first responders. Our public health colleagues have identified a serious outcome and our practice and research technology that has been so effective with other sleep medicine is needed. The setup of early intervention and prevention of sleep deprivation in first responders by Sleep Specialist is essential to more fully addressing this serious concern.

### References:

1. Farina A (2018) What can CDC data tell us about First Responder suicide?
2. Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance.