



RALPH M. TERRAZAS
FIRE CHIEF

September 22, 2016

BOARD OF FIRE COMMISSIONERS
FILE NO. 16-114

TO: Board of Fire Commissioners

FROM: *RMT* Ralph M. Terrazas, Fire Chief

SUBJECT: MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING "AIRS"

FINAL ACTION:	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved	<input type="checkbox"/> Approved w/Corrections	<input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawn
	<input type="checkbox"/> Denied	<input type="checkbox"/> Received & Filed	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

SUMMARY

This Board Report is a follow up detailing the Department's approach when responding to and dealing with mental health emergencies.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board:
Receive and file.

FINDINGS

Patients experiencing mental health emergencies pose obvious challenges for our Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) and Paramedics.

While the LAFD responds to patients with mental health emergencies all over the City, the largest concentration of these patients appears to be in areas of the city where there is a high homeless population.

Our members only get basic training on mental health emergencies during their EMT and paramedic training. These are challenging patients and their needs are not easily addressed in the prehospital environment. As we have seen across the nation, patients with mental health emergencies pose a significant challenge for both law enforcement and EMS.

It has become evident, after evaluating 2015 data where the LAFD responded to 11,805 incidents for mental health emergencies, resulting in over 20,000 actual emergency responses, that the LAFD needs to develop a program to raise the level of AWARENESS, increase the ability to IDENTIFY those with mental illness, make first

responders and the public aware of the RESOURCES that are available for those experiencing mental health emergencies, and develop a heightened level of SENSITIVITY to those responding to patients with mental illness. This training program will be referred to as the "AIRS" program for mental illness.

Doctor Kristen Wheldon, the Department psychologist, is in the process of developing a training program that will prepare Department members responding to those suffering from mental illness to adequately address their needs. The program will be launched on Target Solutions at the first of the year, 2017, and will be comprised of the following:

- Recognize the most common mental illnesses, developmental/intellectual disabilities, and co-occurring substance abuse disorders they may encounter as pre-hospital care providers
- Develop and utilize effective de-escalation techniques needed to bring about a peaceful resolution to an incident involving a person suffering from a mental illness or in a mental health crisis
- Develop knowledge and understanding of state and federal laws applicable to common mental illnesses, developmental/intellectual disabilities, and co-occurring substance abuse disorders/mental illness.
- Formulate the questions necessary to conduct an effective mental health assessment
- Identify the mental health related behavior(s) and the most appropriate resources and facilities to care for those suffering from a mental illness
- Develop an understanding of stigma and the importance of empathy when dealing with this population

At the completion of this course, the student will be able to identify a person suffering from a mental illness or in a mental health crisis, properly manage and de-escalate the situation and conduct a comprehensive assessment. The LAPD's, Mental Evaluation Unit (MEU) Mental Health Intervention Training utilizes similar topics in their training curriculum. Each LAFD member will receive hours of credit towards their EMT or Paramedic License for the purpose of recertification.

FISCAL IMPACT

The growing number of LAFD responses to patients with mental health emergencies is placing an increasing demand on our already strained EMS delivery system. These responses, compounded by the increase in wall time, will necessitate funding of additional emergency resources in the field. The Department has already requested funding for additional Nurse Practitioner Units (NPRU) to assist in getting the mental health patients to the most appropriate receiving facility. We have already witnessed success with the first NPRU in providing exemplary care for patients in need. The creation of additional NPRU's will require ongoing increases in our annual budget.

CONCLUSION

Patients requesting LAFD assistance for mental health emergencies pose a growing challenge for our Department. We are exploring innovative approaches to confront this important issue to try to bring properly trained mental health professionals to these patients, and then provide the proper disposition to best address their needs. The LAFD is working closely with the Los Angeles Police Department, Mental Evaluation Unit and the Department of Mental Health to provide the most appropriate and best care possible.

Board Report prepared by Corey Rose, Assistant Chief, Emergency Medical Services Bureau.