

Mental health training for police: what should the focus be?

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“We have lost the core art of policing...”

A question of competing priorities?

- Reactive training agenda
- Operational Safety and Tactics Training focus
- Time pressures responding to incidents
- Where do you find the time for dedicated training?
- Community expectations

“We only see them at their worst and they only see us at our worst”

What can the police learn from mental health services?

NICE Clinical Practice Guideline 25

- Aggression management commonplace in mental health policy and practice...
- Robertson et al. (2012) - no evidence base for what works with de-escalation and limit setting
- Guidelines based on practice-based wisdom

Interpersonal and therapeutic communication strategies

- de Tribolet-Hardy, Kesic & Thomas (2015) – commonalities between community policing and mental health nursing
- Duality of roles leading to conflict for both
- De-escalation most effective when communicating in respectful, empathetic, calm and controlled manner (Finfgeld-Connett, 2009)
- Limit setting with options – maintain some control (and voice and dignity) in decision-making (Lancee et al., 1995)
- Linguistic style matching and interpersonal synchrony (Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2002)

Cognitive templates for crisis incidents

- Recognition Primed Decision Making (Gary Klein) – need to understand decision-making processes
- Situational assessment - “finding the first option that works not necessarily the best option”
- Need for what Hammond (1988) refers to as “intuitive cognition”
- Creative thinking derived from operational geography (Seric & Thomas)
- How can you best create cognitive templates for police to draw upon?

Recommendations

- Careful analysis of existing language and terminology being used in training packages
- Learn through experiences of others – tap into ‘accumulated practical wisdom’
- Focus on the practical, provide knowledge-based information to reinforce/bolster
- Reinforce procedural justice framework for understanding breadth of interface to reframe the core art of policing
- Need for specialised training, but more broadly embed across all policing curricula, ensure annual boosters – make it **core business!**
- Building blocks and frameworks have to be in place first... and be reinforced...

Questions / contact

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