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EMERGENCY MEDICAL RESPONSE

Helping the Helpers: A Focus on Provider Mental Health

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Introduction: Emergency medical services (EMS) is a high-stress profession, which can lead to deterioration in provider mental health over time. EMS providers may find themselves in a situation where they are not only treating the general public, but also each other. Until now, there has been no active training or emphasis on provider mental health. This has taken its toll and can lead to PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) in field providers and managers alike.

Aim: Identifying and managing stressors is crucial to longevity in the field of EMS. Managers must have the ability to broach sensitive matters with their subordinates, and effectively debrief them following such stressful incidents.

Methods: Magen David Adom held a two-day seminar for its administration, from which they learned signs and symptoms of PTSD, how to approach teams who had been in stressful

situations, and how to properly debrief the teams. The seminar culminated in mass casualty incident (MCI) drills, where there were 4 active scenes. Scene 1 had a team that was physically injured. Scene 2 had a team which cared for the team from scene 1. Scene 3 had a team suffering from emotional stress and ceased to function. Scene 4 had only wounded civilians. The drill focused on provider emotions and used actors and props to simulate an exceedingly complex MCI situation.

Results: Following the drill, a debriefing was held and it was found that all of the points of interest had been noted and properly dealt with.

Discussion: Holding a successful drill assisted in providing participants with an accurate sense of such stressful situations in which their subordinates find themselves on a daily basis. The debriefing session succeeded in identifying potential stressors for field providers and teaching the participants the appropriate way to approach such sensitive matters.

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