

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

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DESERT WATERS CORRECTIONAL OUTREACH

A NON-PROFIT FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CORRECTIONAL STAFF AND THEIR FAMILIES

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2011 Research Study Submitted for Publication

The survey conducted in 2011 through ICREW, the research branch of Desert Waters, was submitted for consideration for publication to Psychological Services, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Psychological Association for Division 18, Psychologists in Public Service.

Below is the abstract of the study. Please note that the PTSD rate reported in this study refers to PTSD symptoms experienced over "the past month."

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in United States Corrections Professionals: Impact on Health and Functioning

Caterina G. Spinaris, Michael D. Denhof, & Julie A. Kellaway

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to estimate posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) prevalence rates among United States' corrections professionals and explore psychological, physical, and occupational functioning in relation to PTSD. Using a secure online survey, a nationwide sample of corrections professionals (N=3599) completed the PTSD Checklist-Civilian Version (PCL-C), the Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21), the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), and the Impact on Functioning Scale (IOFS). Participants also responded to questions indicating the degree to which they witnessed or experienced incidents of workplace violence, injury and death (VID), related emotions, health conditions, and coping behaviors. Results indicated an overall PTSD rate of 27%, with males and security/custody personnel demonstrating significantly higher rates than females and non-security staff. In reference to the entire sample, PTSD-positive participants reported significantly 1) more exposure to workplace VID, 2) more negative related emotions, 3) higher levels of depression and anxiety, 4) more absenteeism, health services utilization, chronic health conditions and substance use, and 5) lower life satisfaction and levels of functioning. Implications and future areas of research are discussed.

Keywords: Corrections professionals, PTSD, health, trauma, violence.

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IN MEMORIAM

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This article examines issues that correctional agencies might consider when discussing the implementation of programs designed to prevent and remediate Corrections Fatigue and related organizational climate and staff well-being issues. Briefly, our qualifications for offering our perspectives on corrections staff's well-being are the following: Gregory Morton has served at the Oregon Department of Corrections since 1975, including eight years as Staff Training Administrator. Concern for the professional and life skills of the corrections workforce has been his primary motivation throughout. Mike Denhof is a clinical research psychologist with over 12 years of experience working in correctional and mental health settings, including extensive experience in inmate mental health and risk assessment, and general clinical-behavioral health and outcomes research. Mike has played a lead role in the development of clinical-behavioral assessment models for the State of Colorado, for multiple large behavioral health organizations (BHOs), and for numerous mental health centers, jails, and different types of correctional organizations. Caterina Spinaris is a licensed professional counselor and the founding director of Desert Waters Correctional Outreach, with 11 years of experience training and treating corrections staff and their family members. She is also the author of the book Staying Well: Strategies for Corrections Staff.

In our role as correctional employees we are problem solvers. We don't like letting problems fester. We are trained to confront difficult situations. We are eager, sometimes even overly so, to address issues when we see them. We don't like unfinished business or letting obvious oversights go uncorrected.

However, there is one historical predicament that impacts all of us but that none of us have ever addressed fully – the mental and emotional toll that the profession itself takes on its practitioners. Instead we have simply lived with it, even though recognition of negative effects of the job is not a new thing, as illustrated in this quote from 1980 regarding rookie corrections officers:

Watching their initial entrance into the prison can be quite an experience. The hope on their faces, the positive anxiety of their motivated gait—at first, it's all there. Then, slowly and almost methodically, the smiles wane, the expectations atrophy, and the desires to perform in a positive fashion succumb to escapist fantasy and verbally acknowledged skepticism. ...After six months to a year the period of hope and enthusiasm should almost be all over.¹

At Desert Waters Correctional Outreach we call the cumulative effect of stressors inherent to correctional settings Corrections Fatigue. These stressors may be organizational, operational and/or traumatic. Organizational stress stems from leadership and management practices and from the manner in which corrections employees interact and “do business” with one another. Operational stress derives from the peculiarities of the job, such as shift work and mandatory overtime. Traumatic stress results from witnessing violence, injury and death on the job, or being the victim of assault or threats of violence. We maintain that these adverse influences have not been addressed as thoroughly as is needed. There are emerging national data about the elevated levels of corrections staff's organizational, operational and traumatic stress and the associated toxic effects. The data match the anecdotal conclusions of most corrections veterans about the intrinsic difficulties of the corrections environment.

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There are reasons for this historical lack of extensive and systematic study of the effects of corrections work on its practitioners. This paper will discuss some of those reasons. Our hope is that by openly naming some of them, a more comprehensive and balanced discussion of this topic will be catalyzed among corrections professionals of all ranks and in a variety of correctional settings. Alternatively, the reader may prefer to prepare internally a briefer version of this document so as to address more specific issues of his/her agency, perhaps using this one as a template. We strongly encourage either approach. May the dialogue begin, or in some cases expand!

Many agencies have conducted wellness programs for staff. Nearly all have Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) available, maybe for family members too. It is our hope at Desert Waters that these activities are only the beginning of solutions that corrections staff and their loved ones can hope to receive. We recognize that change can come slowly, many times for good reason. But the difference between a well-considered solution and the fad of the day is the amount of time, energy and focus that goes into choosing the proper course of action. It is in that spirit that this paper is presented.

Typically, wellness and EAP programs do not adequately address the ways Corrections Fatigue impacts the individual staff member or the organizational climate or culture of corrections institutions. Wellness and EAP programs are not typically set up to provide means to improve the workplace atmosphere. If the organizational climate and culture remain negative, a vicious cycle ensues where jaded veteran professionals can stifle new employees by passing on dysfunctional attitudes and perspectives, thus perpetuating the negative influences of Corrections Fatigue. This is of course not true for all veteran corrections professionals, but it certainly occurs.

Effective organizational improvement programs require interventions which target the reduction of organizational, operational and traumatic stressors, and foster knowledge and techniques for managing emotions and health when unavoidable stressors occur. All three categories of stressors need to be systematically addressed for effective and lasting improvements in employee well-being and functioning, and for the maintenance of healthy correctional work environments.

Corrections Fatigue is the cumulative negative transformation of one's self or personality that develops over time as a result of repeated exposure to corrections workplace stressors, and to a degree that hinges on the relative success of both personal and collective strategies for coping.

Said in another way, Corrections Fatigue involves not just repeated discrete experiences of stress, but also a gradual and cumulative wear-and-tear of the body, soul and spirit, for both individuals and groups.

To quote an active corrections professional, "What I come across at work wounds my soul."

The toll of Corrections Fatigue can be understood to manifest on a continuum of health status, spanning from the presence of few or minimal signs, to signs of moderate severity, to the meeting of PTSD criteria, and even to the extreme of becoming homicidal and/or suicidal.

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In the following pages a variety of assertions for and against implementation of systemic interventions designed to promote the health and health maintenance of corrections worker communities are discussed. The discussion is informed in particular by recent findings on the health impact of repeated exposure to traumatic events in the corrections workplace, and other material, such as individual and collective opinions from experienced workers in the field. The discussion is intended to help deconstruct uninformed claims and elaborate more informed propositions and solutions.

PERSPECTIVES AGAINST THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMS THAT ADDRESS ORGANIZATIONAL, OPERATIONAL AND TRAUMATIC STRESS OF CORRECTIONS EMPLOYEES, AND THEIR REFUTATION

1. WE DON'T HAVE THE FUNDS FOR ADDITIONAL EMPLOYEE HEALTH INTERVENTION/MAINTENANCE PROGRAMS:

Corrections agencies are already huge consumers of economic resources. Adding new programs—trainings, system-wide interventions, counseling and support, family education, continued research—will require new resources and will therefore cause agencies to incur additional costs. Since it is cheaper to operate with the services we currently have, it would be fiscally prudent to wait for economically healthier times before undertaking anything further.

While it is fact that budgets are often strained for correctional organizations, it is also true that the absence of effective health maintenance programming for corrections workers leads to increased costs that would not otherwise be incurred. Unhealthy and/or unhappy employees, for example: are more likely to quit their jobs, use more sick days, require more doctor visits, use substances in excess, and create the necessity of costly overtime payment to employees who must take up the slack. Unhealthy and unhappy employees are the building blocks of unhealthy and sickened work environments—environments lacking supportiveness of coworkers, tolerance for differing perspectives, acknowledgement of emotionally and mentally taxing circumstances, or sensitivity to human suffering and health maintenance needs. For all of the above reasons, investment in intervention and health-maintenance programs offers not only financial rewards but also improved quality of life, job performance and safety in the work place.

2. CORRECTIONS IS INHERENTLY DIFFICULT AND THEREFORE SIMPLY REQUIRES TOUGH PERSONNEL:

The most violent and/or antisocial members of our population are collected according to the tenets of jurisprudence and then assembled all in one location. Daily and voluntarily corrections employees walk into their workplaces to keep order and ensure safety. Potentially traumatic incidents can occur and are expected to occur. This is not new. Employees knew of these conditions when they started. The physical environment and potential dangers are commonly recognized. "I had no idea" is really not much of a defense. Moreover, why would we want to keep staff that can't stand up to the pressures? The environment itself plays a large part in the sorting process for who stays and who goes. This is probably no different from the influence on any employee in any working environment—a day-care center worker, a landscape contractor, a treatment plant technician, a roofer, and so on. If you don't like it, you change jobs.

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While this is a fair statement to say that corrections work requires toughness, it is also true that “toughness” is an adaptation that comes with a variety of consequences, both for the individual and the work community. We become callous and emotionally shielded to protect ourselves from emotional pain and discomfort and from repeated experiences of a potentially traumatic nature. While this coping mechanism can be adaptive in the short term for individuals, as a long-term approach to dealing with the unique stresses of correctional environments, emotional numbing is much less functional, and in fact it is one of the characteristics of Corrections Fatigue.

When we mask our feelings to an excessive degree, we gain some emotional protection, but we pay a large price for it. Emotional callousness and emotional numbing can easily carry over into our personal lives, leaving our family members feeling disconnected from us, and us from them. Emotional callousness also promotes insensitivity and indifference, which rob a person not only of negative experiences but also of positive ones. On a systemic level, insensitive/emotionally callous employees take a toll on newer employees by stifling their optimism, discouraging a natural and full range of human experience and emotion, and reducing new employees’ capacity for empathy and sensitivity. Moreover, emotional callousness and numbing are likely to encourage insensitive and even hostile or combative attitudes toward offenders, with all the consequent dangers that these attitudes engender. Propagation of an ideology of toughness in correctional environments is not an optimal approach to health maintenance for correctional cultures. It has some short-term utility as a means to coping with difficult emotions, but its long-term and systemic consequences to employee health and well-being are likely to far outweigh its benefits.

3. INCREASED OPENNESS AND EDUCATION ABOUT THE NATURE OF HEALTH RISKS INHERENT TO CORRECTIONS WORK WILL PROVIDE LAZY WORKERS WITH AN EXCUSE TO JUSTIFY POOR WORK PERFORMANCE, ABSENTEEISM, OR MALINGERING:

It’s not the employees who quit and leave who cause the greatest problem; it’s the employees who quit and stay. Marginal cases, whose motivations are confusing and whose health outcomes can be debated, are a huge drain on the costs of an agency and the morale of shifts and work units. Giving them reason to blame the system and demand healthcare due to a work-related condition will only make the financial drain bigger.

Realistically speaking, there will always be an occasional low-performance employee or even a malingerer from time to time within the ranks of an organization. However, it is illogical to assume that full disclosure of the health risks and consequences associated with corrections work will result in a landslide of lazy or malingering employees. Human beings naturally want to live healthy and full lives, if they can. In the face of difficulties or stressful circumstances, human beings naturally adopt coping mechanisms that are to some degree functional for them. But they do not always choose good methods of coping, often because they are not aware of all the options. People who abuse or take advantage of systems may do so at least partly because they are unable to adapt and succeed through more functional channels of coping and problem-solving. In fact, the best way to deter employees from adopting such negative ways of coping, such as malingering, is by educating and training staff on optimal strategies and techniques for health maintenance, and by systemically cultivating a work community that is healthy, supportive, and committed to pro-health activities.

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Effective and functional strategies for health maintenance, stress management, and the creation of a positive organizational climate are available. Administrators must be willing to blaze new trails and work against the grain of potentially entrenched and systemically dysfunctional practices and thinking. They must also do so without iron clad guarantees of success. There are no such guarantees. Success usually emerges gradually through learning from repeated attempts and persistent efforts to solve a problem. Inaction, on the other hand, is a fairly certain path to continually high turnover rates, high sick leave rates, employee under-functioning, stress-related mistakes, oversights and accidents, and—only too often—employee suicides. Both history and empirical research support this view.

4. IT IS THE INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEE'S RESPONSIBILITY TO TAKE CARE OF THEIR OWN HEALTH AND WELL-BEING, NOT THE ORGANIZATION'S:

Work is only part of an employee's day. No agency, no matter how large or small, can be expected to address all of the modern life pressures that each member of their workforce faces. Employees must be expected to take care of their personal lives on their own. We expect offenders to do so to a large degree. Having different expectations for employees would be bad corrections practice and also unmanageable.

While it is true that individuals, and individual employees, are responsible to take action both at work and outside of work to promote and maintain their health and well-being, the idea that individuals can do so while spending the majority of their waking hours in a systemically toxic work environment is untenable. Human beings are social creatures and the world is to a great extent socially constructed. Even the most radical or independent of individuals will experience a powerful amount of stress in the absence of support that stems from social validation—validation of their needs, beliefs, values and behaviors.

It is simply too much to expect individuals to immerse themselves in a high-pressure community, such as a correctional work environment, and be able to maintain health and well-being if the people around them (offenders or coworkers) behave in unhealthy or antisocial ways, or embrace destructive or antisocial values. Such communities result in diseased systems—environments that promote contagious and pervasive dysfunctions and disorders. Self-help and individual coping strategies for health maintenance can only do so much and for so long for workers immersed in such systems. It is for this reason that employee health must be addressed on an organizational level in addition to an individual level.

It is without a doubt within the organization's best interest to do everything they can to ensure that their employees and work environments are healthy and configured in such a way as to promote health maintenance. Work performance is inextricably intertwined with employee health. Thus the administrator who has an interest in optimal and safe performance of his/her employees cannot ignore addressing health maintenance and well-being as a prerequisite. This is true in general for all types of work communities but arguably especially true for correctional work environments, given the inherent dangerousness and negativity of the environment, and given the inherent traumatizing potential for corrections professionals.

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Corrections Staff Well-being Programs—To Implement or Not? (Continued from page 6) Page 7**5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROGRAMS ADDRESSING ORGANIZATIONAL, OPERATIONAL, AND TRAUMATIC STRESS HAS NOT BEEN PROVEN:**

An extensively researched approach is necessary before serious action is taken. While it is good news that studies could lead to evidence-based programs for correctional employees' well-being, for now that effort is in the hands of experts and specialists. Corrections-specific causes may be felt or presumed by those of us who do the daily work and see the consequences first hand, but the rigorous scientific conclusions are only beginning to be published. Therefore, we should wait until there is more evidence that the corrections workplace impacts employees sufficiently negatively to warrant interventions on their behalf.

While a mix of evidence for or against the impact of programs for correctional employees' well-being can be identified in the research literature, we need to remember that even our best science and research methods can only capture so much, and this is even more true in areas of interest as dynamic, complicated and elusive as are social systems and psychological processes.

If we limit our willingness to take action or make changes because the "correct" decision is not crystal-clear or 100% certain, then we may be waiting indefinitely. Decision-makers in correctional organizations, for the health of their employees and work communities, we would argue, are best served by not only taking into account what available research literature is saying, but also what their personal experience and judgment are saying, what the consensus judgment of their peers and employees are saying, what the history of events in the organization suggests, and any other sources of evidence about what is really happening, such as feedback from employees' families. The consequences of a default to the status quo are just too costly in correctional environments. We cannot continue to do the same things and expect different results. Suicide rates, for example, are highly elevated for correctional staff² and they will continue to be unless new and systemic changes are made in correctional environments—changes designed to promote and maintain employee health and well-being.

MORE REASONS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMS THAT ADDRESS ORGANIZATIONAL, OPERATIONAL AND TRAUMATIC STRESS OF CORRECTIONS EMPLOYEES**1. INCREASED STAFF MENTAL HEALTH AND OVERALL WELL-BEING:**

This is a given within the construct of Corrections Fatigue. The existence of EAPs is based on the recognition that employees' mental health is an important component of organizational success, regardless of the line of work. Research identifies a positive return on investment (ROI) for EAPs, and as a result, EAPs continue to flourish. While employee mental health is difficult to quantify, valid measures can be operationalized through research and evidence of progress collected. Desert Waters' 2011 study³ of PTSD prevalence and its impact on health and functioning has estimated PTSD rates to be highly elevated (27%) for corrections employees, for example. The ability of typical EAPs to adequately address the unique health needs of corrections workers on a systemic level is rather low. Off-the-shelf EAPs are not structured to provide that kind of service. Substantive and work-related mental health support requires expert-guided systems-level intervention, ongoing occupational health maintenance practices, and promotion and adoption of preventive health measures.

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Corrections Staff Well-being Programs—To Implement or Not? (Continued from page 7) Page 8**2. REDUCED STAFF SUICIDES:**

Suicide rates are highly elevated for corrections professionals relative to the general population². There is no debating this. It is a well-established fact. Staff suicides are not only directly devastating for spouses, children and loved ones, but also to the mindset of corrections employee cultures. Suicides send powerful, reverberating signals, both inside and outside organizations, about the risks and potential toll of careers in the field of corrections—signals that influence the decisions of potential future employees who are considering career paths. To the extent that good prospects opt away from corrections due to a marred reputation, the profession and the quality of operations will be downgraded.

Staff suicides represent the reddest of red flags indicating serious systemic problems. While all employee suicides cannot be directly attributed to the toll of stressors and trauma inherent to corrections work, the well-established elevated rates particular to this field of work strongly indicate that suicide in fact is a hazard of the occupation. The gradual wear-and-tear suffered due to Corrections Fatigue may well render employees emotionally fragile, and thus more vulnerable and likely to succumb when faced with “last straw” losses that they would have otherwise been able to prevent or endure. Research indicates that individuals who take their own lives most often are lacking social and emotional support, and are feeling hopeless about the future, powerless to change their circumstances, and/or worthless. These characteristics can be addressed both individually and systemically through training on healthy principles of coping with adversity, positive employee interaction and support, and proper handling of employees following exposure to particularly traumatizing or otherwise stressful events.

3. REDUCED OPERATING COSTS:

Agency-specific research similar to the national studies conducted by Desert Waters can help agencies identify sources, sometimes veiled, that drive up agency expenses. You may have already explored or become familiar with some of these sources yourself. You might even be able to fit actual numbers into the discussion. For our purposes here, we cite Desert Waters’ national-level data submitted by all levels and disciplines of correctional employees.

a) **REDUCED OVERTIME FROM UNSCHEDULED CALL-INS:** Desert Waters’ most recent nationwide study³ on correctional employee wellness found that staff who met PTSD criteria (27% PTSD-Positive) had almost twice the number of sick leave days per year and three times the number of worker compensation days than those who did not meet PTSD criteria. The reality of security staff scheduling is that if the assigned employee is absent, then a substitute must be found. In most cases this means that a fellow employee must work overtime. The cost for that post is a pay rate increased by 50%. Reports have been published of security staff making higher salaries than management level staff due to nothing more than frequent overtime hours. The necessity of overtime work also aggravates the health of employees, particularly if it happens more than occasionally. And so the Corrections Fatigue cycle continues while the cash register rings.

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b) **REDUCED MEDICAL COSTS:** Desert Waters' 2011 study also showed that PTSD-positive employees reported almost twice the number of doctor visits and had twice as many stress-related chronic health conditions, with sleep disturbances, depression, obesity and digestive problems representing the top four chronic ailments. PTSD-positive staff reported significantly more use of alcoholic beverages per week, and tobacco per day, than the PTSD-negative group did. The potential impact of all of the above findings upon health care-related costs, not to mention quality of work performance and morale, are fairly self-evident.

c) **REDUCED TURNOVER:** Correctional employees stay in their jobs not only for income and retirement interests, but also to contribute to an important and worthwhile societal function, and to generate a sense of meaning and connectedness in relation to their work communities and the wider communities in which they live. Turnover costs in the field of corrections are enormous relative to other industries and very likely due to the particularly difficult environments in which corrections professionals must operate during the majority of their full-time working lives.

While corrections work will always be a particularly tough environment to serve in due to its unique risks and its challenges to employee health and well-being, the necessary training and interventions are available to equip and prepare workers for the task. Reducing the high cost of turnover, and keeping it reduced, requires systemic level intervention and long term commitment to implementing both research-guided and professionally recommended strategies. Successful interventions to improve the health of employees and systems can be expected to, over time, reduce both recruitment costs and training expenses. The better trained the workers are, and the more in-sync they are with one another, the more frequently will health and effective work skills naturally transfer from one employee to the next, through on-the-job modeling.

4. OPTIMIZED WORK PERFORMANCE, HEALTHIER INTERPERSONAL SKILLS AND MEANINGFUL, VALUE-GUIDED DECISION-MAKING:

A sense of meaning is essential for human beings and cultures at all levels, including work cultures. Through Desert Waters' informal questioning of staff over the years, we have repeatedly encountered statements characterizing coworkers of all ranks as a top source of work-related stress—often even exceeding the perceived amount of stress following from interactions with offenders. We hear complaints about other employees' complacency, bullying, rudeness, favoritism, unfairness, meanness, or laziness—to name a few. This feedback further reinforces the view that the cumulative stressors that figure into Corrections Fatigue are constituted to an extent by changeable facets of organizational practices and patterns of behavior among staff. The benefits of work communities structured to address those issues are many: in terms of individual employee health, well-being, and safety; in terms of optimal and well-coordinated functioning of work communities; in terms of organizational reputations; and in terms of leadership figures who are respected and who inspire their employees in productive and functional ways.

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Corrections Staff Well-being Programs—To Implement or Not? (Continued from page 9) Page 10**5. INCREASED INTERPERSONAL SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE OFFENDER MANAGEMENT:**

The most effective corrections employees are those with the knowledge and skill to consistently model pro-social behaviors while expecting the same from the offenders they supervise. The basic concepts of role modeling—reinforcement and re-direction—are much more successfully accomplished when employees can attend to their work with minimal emotional disruptions. Many offenders are highly skilled at keeping employees off balance, and thus employees are easily susceptible to impulsive knee-jerk reactions of fight or flight. Employees with adequate training in managing the organizational, operational and traumatic stressors inherent to their work lives, however, are both less susceptible to being manipulated and better equipped to manage offenders in a manner that reduces emotional and behavioral volatility and acting out, while also promoting environmental order and control.

6. INCREASED WORK SATISFACTION:

Numerous job satisfaction studies have underlined the fact that more than money, more than work environment, more than seemingly fundamental conditions such as safety and health, people are inherently satisfied at work when they have a job they can make decisions about, when they have opportunity to successfully complete a defined set of duties, and when they are recognized for their efforts and accomplishments. Satisfied employees go beyond the minimum requirements of their job. They pay more attention to detail, try harder, and are overall less vulnerable to Corrections Fatigue. They also take fewer shortcuts, and are less likely to call in sick or violate policies. While incentives like salary increases are more intuitive potential motivators, increasing an employee's tool box of skills is arguably among the shortest routes to promoting employee work satisfaction. Corrections is a "people business." Thorough training in interpersonal and leadership skills for managing offenders and interacting with coworkers and subordinates is absolutely essential.

7. IMPROVED ABILITY TO FUNCTION AND ENJOY LIFE OUTSIDE OF WORK:

One of the most dramatic results observed in Desert Water's 2011 study of corrections worker health and well-being had to do with off-duty functioning. PTSD-positive employees demonstrated significantly higher depression, anxiety and stress scores, and significantly lower life satisfaction scores. In addition, they demonstrated significantly less ability to: maintain personal relationships, enjoy leisure time, effectively care for dependents, and carry out personal responsibilities. We have to wonder, what exactly did our loved ones do to deserve this from us as partners? Do our partners not deserve to be in relationships that are mutually beneficial and mutually supportive? Adequate partnership requires health maintenance and ability to function and ability to support the needs of others from time to time. Our partners stick by us in difficult times and are often nevertheless "rewarded" by having us leave our best selves at work. Without well informed and well devised systemic level interventions to promote and maintain employee health, the impact of Corrections Fatigue will continue to spill over into the personal lives of corrections professionals—as if their work lives were not difficult enough. Balanced and healthy human beings need to be able to rest and enjoy their time away from work. This is true for everybody, regardless of their profession, but even more so for individuals who choose careers in an occupation as uniquely stressful and challenging as corrections.

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Strained or failed relationships with significant others compound stress, promote loss and isolation, and render corrections workers even more vulnerable to depression, substance abuse or suicide.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE RESEARCH:

We have referred to evidence-based studies earlier in this paper. As the science and technology of offender rehabilitation improves, it becomes increasingly possible and likely that jurisdictions will create mandates for the reduction of recidivism, as is now the case in several states. Taking into account changes following from healthcare reform, it is also becoming clear that funding sources for healthcare providers of all types will increasingly hinge on the ability of the organization to objectively and tangibly demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness. And there is no reason to expect that programs designed for the maintenance of corrections employee health will somehow remain immune to the same criteria.

A recent study of PTSD prevention showed that 12 weekly sessions of either of two types of psychological trauma treatment (cognitive therapy and prolonged exposure therapy) reduced the incidence of PTSD dramatically 5 and 9 months later, as compared to no treatment or medication treatment alone. Desert Waters' 2011 study of PTSD prevalence and its impact on health and functioning provide compelling indication of the need for such preventive interventions, based on the discovery of elevated PTSD rates, significantly higher rates of PTSD than other trauma-exposed professionals, significantly more co-occurring disorders, significantly higher levels of functional impairments, and significantly lower life satisfaction, for individuals meeting PTSD criteria.

IN SUM

All that is required at this point is to start the conversation. Desert Waters believes that once the discussion begins, the seriousness of the issues will become more apparent, and the need for changes more pressing and prioritized. We want your organization to be in the best position possible to protect the health of its employees and their families, to maintain the most orderly, healthy, and effective work cultures possible, and to establish and/or maintain your organizations as among the most reputable and successful. We fully recognize and honor the important functions your organizations serve for society and the risks your workforce takes in the universal struggle to contend with inherently challenging work conditions and critically important responsibilities.

If it was not clear to you already, it is probably clear now that we at Desert Waters have strong opinions about corrections employees' well-being, their workplace climate, and the causes and consequences of Corrections Fatigue. We do not, however, ask you to adopt our opinions for your agency without serious and intentional consideration. You are the experts on your agency. All we ask is that you do undertake that deliberation, and that you do have those conversations and join in the dialogue. We intend to be here, designing systems-wide interventions, delivering trainings, certifying instructors, conducting research, staffing the Corrections Ventline, and counseling corrections employees and their family members just as we have been for the past nine years. Please contact us at any time. We all want the same things, namely the physical, psychological and spiritual health for you and the men and women of your agency's workforce. We hope this discussion takes us all closer to that destination.

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Introducing Michael D. Denhof, Ph.D.

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We at Desert Waters are very excited to introduce to you the latest addition to our team, Dr. Michael (Mike) D. Denhof, Ph.D. Dr. Denhof has served as a DWCO volunteer since 2005, and as a consultant for the design, analyses and write-up of DWCO/ICREW's surveys in 2010 and 2011.

Dr. Denhof is a clinical research psychologist with over 12 years of experience working in correctional and mental health settings. He has extensive experience in offender mental health and risk assessment, general clinical-behavioral health and outcomes research, and the development of analytical software applications that automate and streamline sharing of assessment information and facilitate data-driven and evidence-based decision-making. Mike has played a lead role in the development of clinical-behavioral assessment models for the State of Colorado, for multiple large behavioral health organizations (BHOs), and for numerous mental health centers, jails, and different types of correctional organizations.

In addition to research projects, Mike's major role with Desert Waters is to help capture, expand, and disseminate, on a much wider scale, Desert Waters' unique expertise through affordable web-based products and services, including web-accessible training and educational videos, interactive e-learning modules, PTSD prevention programs, training for trainer (T4T) offerings, and Desert Waters Corrections Fatigue™ Awareness & Prevention Accreditation for facilities and agencies.

Mike is the author of a multi-scaled offender assessment instrument, the SONAR-I® for Corrections, that provides a psychometrically sound and highly efficient approach to the assessment of key offender risk and need areas (i.e., suicide risk, mental disorder, severity of criminal mentality, substance abuse risk, violence risk, among other areas). A goal of Desert Waters within the next 12 months is to release the SONAR-I assessment system for wide-scale use as a highly efficient and affordable solution to offender assessment.

In line with Desert Waters' vision, Mike will be instrumental in the design and production of additional web-accessible training videos scheduled for release by Desert Waters in the near future including: (1) Principles of Healthy and Effective Correctional Staff Interaction: Developing and Maintaining a Positive Correctional Work Climate; (2) Corrections Staff Suicide: Prevention, Intervention & Postvention; and (3) Professional Boundaries for Men and Women Working in Corrections.

Help Us Serve

- As Desert Waters' outreach expands, so does the need for funds. Help support Desert Waters' services offered at no charge to recipients: the Corrections Ventline, the Correctional Oasis, and emergency counseling/crisis intervention sessions.
- You can do so by contributing \$5/month (\$60/year or 17 cents/day).
- Donate online through Paypal (http://desertwaters.com/?page_id=67) or mail your check to DWCO, PO Box 355, Florence, CO 81226.
- Your gifts are tax-deductible. Together indeed we accomplish more!

Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



*a non-profit organization
for the well-being of correctional
staff and their families*

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Quote of the Month

*Courage is the first of the
human qualities because it is
the quality which guarantees
all the others.*

~Winston Churchill

DWCO Mission

To increase the occupational,
personal and family well-being of
staff of all disciplines within the
corrections profession.