

MHUU News

Monthly Newsletter of the Houston Police Department's Mental Health Unit

February 2010

Fish Oil and Psychosis

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Forced Entry

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C O V E R S T O R Y

Dealing with the mentally ill: Five survival principles

The majority of individuals with mental illness are no more prone to violence than the average population. A small percentage, however, are afflicted with the most serious mental illnesses and continually go into crisis requiring police intervention. The majority of these individuals have a psychotic disorder. These individuals are potentially the most dangerous individuals police respond to.

The following are five officer safety principles to keep in mind when responding to individuals in serious mental health crises:

1. **Remember that mentally ill individuals can be extremely unpredictable.** A seemingly calm encounter can suddenly explode into a violent, potentially lethal

fight-for-your-life situation. Remain aware of the person's demeanor and body language. Stay alert for verbal cues that might tip you off to building anxiety and a diminishing level of cooperation. Remember that many individuals in mental health crisis demonstrate extraordinary strength and insensitivity to pain.

2. **Do not let past experiences with a mentally ill person dictate your current response.** As mentioned above, individuals in mental health crises are unpredictable. The person you are responding to may have been very calm and cooperative the last four times you have interacted with him. Do not expect him to be calm and cooperative during your fifth encounter. Do not have

preconceived beliefs about his demeanor and behavior. Expect the unexpected. If it is safe to do so, utilize your de-escalation techniques but be prepared to go tactical if necessary. Stay alert and on guard.

3. **Stay safe while trying to help.** You may respond to a scene involving a suicidal teenager holding a gun to his head. You call your supervisor and explain you have a special threat situation. You take cover and start communicating with the teenager while SWAT and HNT are being called. You develop a rapport. You feel the teenager poses no threat to you, that he only desires to harm himself. You may feel it is safe to

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Five survival principles *(continued from page 1)*

leave cover and get closer to improve your communication. ***Do not leave cover. Never approach an armed subject.*** You do not know what is going on in the person's mind or how he will react. There have been situations across the country where police officers have approached an armed suicidal subject and the officers have been shot. The person may appear harmless but appearances can be deceiving.

4. **You have to get the person out of your car.** You have done an excellent job de-escalating the situation. You have the person safely under control and in custody. You are taking him for an emergency detention order. The behavior of many of these individuals goes in cycles. Be aware of the possibility of the person's demeanor and behavior changing while en route to the mental health facility. Continue

using your de-escalation techniques while en route, e.g., continue to talk in a calm tone of voice; use the person's name; assure him that you are going to help, not hurt, him; model the calm behavior you want him to exhibit; try to connect with him on a personal level; actively listen; etc. When you are ready to remove him from your patrol car, tell him what you are going to do before you do it to avoid startling or surprising him, e.g., "We are at the NPC. You are not under arrest. They will help with the voices you are hearing. I am going to help you out of the car by holding your arm."

5. **Even when not under arrest, always search and, as a general rule, handcuff the person.** You are bringing a person to a mental health facility for an emergency detention order. He has committed no crime and is not under arrest. Always search the individual prior to transport. As a general rule,

handcuff for your safety. The department does provide us with discretion regarding the handcuffing of mental health consumers who have committed no crime. As long as you are transporting in a patrol car with a cage, the department considers the cage a restraining device and leaves the decision to handcuff up to the officer. The reason for the exception is the 80-year-old grandmother or grandfather who weighs 100 pounds and whose wrists are frail and fragile and you are certain he/she presents no threat. Do not abuse this discretion. We believe 99.9% of consumers being taken for an emergency detention order should be handcuffed. *If you have any concerns, err on the side of handcuffing. You will never get in trouble for handcuffing a consumer being brought for an emergency detention order.*

Austrian study finds fish oil pills help prevent psychosis

Austrian researchers identified 81 people, ages 13 to 25, with warning signs of psychosis. Those signs included sleeping dramatically more or less than usual, becoming suspicious of others, the belief that people are putting thoughts in their head or thinking they have special, magical powers. The researchers randomly assigned 41 of the patients to take four fish oil pills a day for

three months. The rest of the patients received dummy pills. After one year of monitoring, 2 of 41 patients in the fish oil group became psychotic. In the placebo group, 11 of the 40 became psychotic.

One hypothesis for the cause of schizophrenia is that people with the illness do not process fatty acids correctly, leading to damaged brain

cells. The researchers speculate the Omega-3 fatty acids in fish oil could help brain cells repair and stabilize.

"The results are very impressive and very striking and really represent a step forward potentially for patients and their families," said Dr. Neil Richtand, a schizophrenia researcher at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine.



Court says Michigan cops didn't violate Fourth Amendment rights



By Brian P. Frazier
Michigan Lawyers Weekly

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Police did not violate a man's Fourth Amendment rights by entering his house under the emergency aid exception, even after he told them to get a search warrant, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled Dec. 7.

The decision allows police greater latitude in deciding whether to enter a dwelling without a warrant, requiring only an "objectively reasonable belief" that aid is needed, rather than "ironclad proof" of a threat.

Defense attorney and law professor Kenneth M. Mogill said he thinks the decision may even be a prelude to a greater fight to come over the "emergency aid" exception to the Fourth Amendment.

In *Michigan v. Jeremy Fisher*, Docket No. 09-91, Brownstown Township police arrived at the defendant's house to respond to a complaint that Fisher was "going crazy." They found a pickup truck in the driveway with a smashed front end, a damaged fencepost along the side of the property, and three house windows broken from the inside. They also noticed blood on the hood of the truck, on clothes inside the truck, and on one of the doors to the house. The back door was locked, and a couch was blocking the front door.

The officers looked in a window and saw Fisher screaming and throwing

things. There was some dispute as to whether he had some blood dripping from his hand. The officers asked him if he needed help, to which he responded by swearing at the police and told them to get a search warrant.

One of the officers pushed the front door open and tried to enter, only to find Fisher pointing a rifle at him. Fisher was arrested for assault with a dangerous weapon and possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony.

The circuit court dismissed the charges on grounds that the officer entering the house violated Fisher's Fourth Amendment rights. The Michigan Court of Appeals upheld the trial court in an unpublished decision. The Michigan Supreme Court originally agreed to hear the case, but, after hearing oral arguments, vacated its leave order.

The U.S. Supreme Court granted the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office petition for certiorari, and reversed the Michigan courts without further briefing or oral argument. In a per curiam decision, the 7-2 majority wrote that the Court of Appeals' decision was contrary to Fourth Amendment case law, particularly *Brigham City v. Stuart* (547 U.S. 398), which involved police entering a house to break up a fight.

The "emergency aid exception," the court explained, applies when "the exigencies of the situation [may] make the needs of law enforcement so compelling that the warrantless

search is objectionably reasonable," such as when "the need to assist persons who are seriously injured or threatened with such injury." "Thus, law enforcement officers may enter a home without a warrant to render emergency assistance to an injured occupant or to protect an occupant from imminent injury."

The court took issue with the Michigan Court of Appeals' holding that the situation did not rise to a level of emergency justifying the warrantless intrusion into a residence, because the mere drops of blood did not signal a likely serious, life-threatening injury. "Officers do not need ironclad proof of a 'likely serious, life-threatening' injury to invoke the emergency aid exception," the court said.

In the dissent, Justice John Paul Stevens argued that the court was being too hasty in overturning the Michigan court "when faced with a close question of reasonableness of an officer's actions" without further probing into the facts of the case. He did not opine on the merits of the majority decision.

Wayne County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney David A. McCreedy, who handled the appeals, was pleased with the decision. "We thought that the best result was going to be a per curiam opinion, because this was more of an error correction than it is blazing a new trail or establishing a new law," he said. "This is kind of the best result we saw. In general, they aren't an error-correcting court."

When responding to a person in mental health crisis, consider ...

1. These individuals are very unpredictable; do not assume anything.
2. The person may not identify you as a police officer, even in full uniform.
3. The person probably does not realize he/she is mentally ill.
4. The person may not believe you have his/her best interest at heart.
5. The person may be paranoid and fearful, based on what he/she is seeing and hearing, not on reality.
6. Assure the person you are there to help, not hurt.