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*Future Solutions Today*

### ***Critical Incident Stress Management: First Aid for the Psyche***

By Joseph Fodera, Worldwide Law Enforcement Consulting Group, Inc.

Many first responders have heard tale of the devastation and destruction that has ravaged Mississippi and Louisiana in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Few have been told, or even considered the emotional and psychological damage that has been inflicted upon those who have lost their homes and all of their worldly belongings. We have not heard much of those who dutifully stood their posts, providing those who could not, or would not leave, with aid and comfort. Many of these emergency rescue workers, law enforcement officers and firefighters, also lost their homes, had their families displaced and will need to rebuild their lives, all the while, continuing to provide their vital services to a region in a state of rebirth.

How do these heroic men and women begin to gather their emotions and deal constructively with the reality of what they have experienced? The answer lies in the acronym CISM, which stands for Critical Incident Stress Management. CISM is a comprehensive, integrative, multi-component crisis intervention system. CISM is considered comprehensive because it consists of multiple crisis intervention components, which functionally span the entire temporal spectrum of a crisis. CISM interventions range from the pre-crisis phase through the acute crisis phase, and into the post-crisis phase. CISM is also considered comprehensive in that it consists of interventions, which may be applied to individuals, small functional groups, large groups, families, organizations, and even communities.

CISM consists of 7 Core Components:

1. Pre-Crisis Preparation
2. Implementation of support programs
3. Defusing
4. Critical Incident Stress Debriefing
5. One on One Crisis Intervention or Psychological Counseling
6. Family or Organizational Crisis Intervention
7. Follow-up and Referrals

One of the nation's premier providers of CISM services for law enforcement, fire and other rescue workers immediately after a significant dramatic event is Reverend Gary Evans of the New Hope Church, in Swedesboro New Jersey. Reverend Evans has been called out for service many times since beginning his foray into Critical Incident Stress Management. Reverend Evans has a storied career providing pastoral care and chaplaincy duties for emergency personnel along the East Coast.

In the aftermath of Katrina, he became the first dedicated chaplain assigned by FEMA to administer to the spiritual needs of the people who had been relocated to the many shelters in the area. He has also been a constant provider during many of the nations other tragic events, both large and small. Particularly, he was called by American Airlines to assist with the care giving for the employees, families and customers immediately following the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, Pentagon and our nations airlines. Reverend Evans was deployed to Kennedy International Airport as a member of the airlines' crisis response team. Having been dispatched to New York on September 13<sup>th</sup>, he recalls the following observations: "It was extremely chaotic, just a horrible day. There were people who were afraid to get on airplanes, both travelers and flight crews. Unfortunately, those feelings still exist in many people. At 5:00 p.m. on September 13<sup>th</sup>, I was to a gate to assist with the passengers and crew on flight 113 to Los Angeles." One of the flight attendants had observed 4 passengers who matched the profiles of the hijackers who had taken over several flights just two days earlier and caused the devastation that was plaguing the country on those days. "Based upon the flight attendants observations, four people were taken into custody, and two of them were eventually arrested. My job was to assist the crew and passengers in dealing with what had just happened on that day and in the several days prior." He was also tasked with providing the airlines employees with services that would enable them to continue in their duties and be able to take to the air once again.

Reverend Evans has continued to respond when called upon by emergency workers, in fact, he has spent 9 years as Chaplain to the Danbury Connecticut Police Department, as well as stints as Chaplain for the Connecticut State Police Troop A, New Milford Police Department, Danbury Connecticut Fire Department and the Federal Correctional Institute, Danbury. He received his CISM certification in 1996 from the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, and in 2002, become an ICISF certified trainer. He has since earned his certificate as a trained trainer in CISM.

Reverend Evans states that CISM can be best defined as "emotional first aid". He explains that many people, having not experienced these types of extreme stress conditions, are without the skills and training necessary to facilitate their own critical stress management, therefore, they require the assistance of highly trained, caring professionals who can help them to maneuver back to some sense of normalcy, and assist them in putting things into perspective.

One of the most serious and often endured instances of critical stress pertaining to law enforcement occurs when an officer becomes involved in a shooting. Whether or not resulting in the death of another. Most law enforcement officers will agree that they hope

to never have to use their firearm at any time other than when qualifying at the range, or taking target practice. Unfortunately, and with increasing incidence, law enforcement officers are put in positions, which they would not otherwise find themselves in, had it not been for their employment, wherein they must make life or death decisions to use their firearm or not. Many times, our officers become the victim of physical harm, but, even if they are not “physically” injured, the emotional damage that they might endure can be just as detrimental. It is in just such an instance when CISM can help to bridge the gap, providing the officer with a means to discuss what he or she has just been through, in the best-case scenario, without the concern that their conversations and discussions will be divulged to department management. There must be some sense of privilege as relates to these conversations in order to provide for the best possible healing and recovery.

When asked about his deployment to Mississippi and Louisiana in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Reverend Evans said that he “saw massive devastation unlike anything I have seen in my lifetime.” He was called upon to provide chaplaincy services and CISM to first responders, military and returning displaced persons. He also found himself becoming a rescuer himself, assisting evacuees. On one occasion, he found a woman who was in need of shelter and was able to secure shelter for her in short order.

Many agencies could benefit significantly from an in-house CISM program, be it administered by their respective Department Chaplains, or by having designated members become certified as CISM providers. In the NYPD, there is a program in place called “POPPA”, which stands for Police Organization Providing Peer Assistance. POPPA is staffed by volunteer officers who respond to calls for assistance at any time, day or night. Participation in these types of programs is strictly voluntary and kept in the strictest of confidence. When implemented and staffed sufficiently, not only will the individual department benefit, but the members, and their families will also reap extraordinary benefits. Some of the occupations that can benefit from the implementation of a CISM program in the workplace are law enforcement, fire and rescue personnel, nursing and hospital staff, corporate employees and management personnel, teachers and other educational employees as well as members of the clergy.

Chaplain Evans is available to provide training certification courses at any location by contacting Worldwide Law Enforcement Consulting Group, Inc at 866-488-7755, or, visit [www.worldwidelawenforcement.com/CISM](http://www.worldwidelawenforcement.com/CISM) for further information on an upcoming seminar near you.