

# Leading Through the Darkness: EMS Leadership and Suicide

Over the course of the past few years attention has been placed on the alarming rate of suicide among EMS providers. What was once EMS' taboo secret has transformed into a provocative EMS talking point. Join EMS thought-leader and renowned EMS leader Pat Songer an EMS Chief and Healthcare Executive as he explores the role and importance of leadership during some of the "darkest hours". Mr. Songer's real life experiences will give leaders the ability to better understand the behavioral processes in EMS that may lead to depression and suicide. Most importantly learn how EMS agencies are working to curb suicides and the important role EMS leaders play in the attempt to "revive responders".

The background of the slide is a photograph showing the backs of several people in dark uniforms, likely law enforcement or emergency services, looking towards a bright area in the distance. The text is overlaid on this image.

# **Leading Through the Darkness EMS Leadership & Suicide**

**Pat Songer**

**Administrative Director & EMS Chief**

**Humboldt General Hospital**

**Winnemucca, Nevada**

# HISTORY AND SYSTEM OF HGH EMS

- Volunteer
- Transition to Paid
- Traditional Training and Entry





**HGH**  
Humboldt General Hospital



# WORLD WE WORK IN

- Toughness in Leadership
- Trained for resilience
- Sacrifice
  - Loss of Family time
  - Personal Safety
  - Financial Challenges
  - Mental Stress
  - Significant Continuing Education
  - Health



*Critical Stress has a strong emotional impact on providers, regardless of their years of service.*

**December 22, 2012**



# Barriers/Stigma

## Barriers

- Believing they will get better on their own
- Fear of judgment from peers
- Difficulty with resources finding a qualified therapist.
- Fear that seeking treatment will damage their career

## Stigma

- Culture
- The helpers may need help the most
- Bravado



# PTSD



# UNDERSTANDING – SURVEY

- **Survey completed by the Spring 2014 ASM Group**
- **4,021 Responses to the survey**
  - **85% experienced Critical Stress**
  - **66% did not seek help**

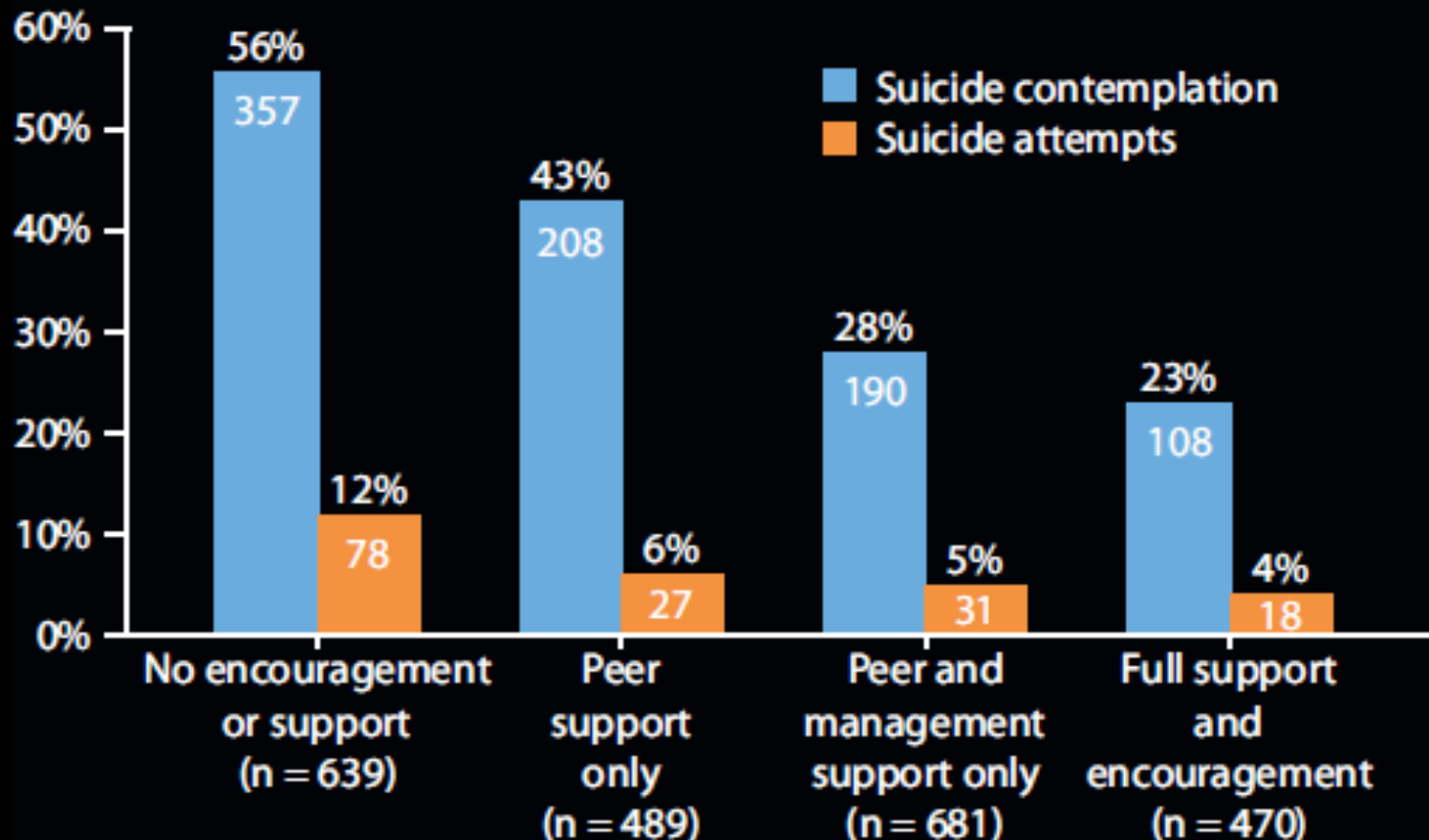


# UNDERSTANDING – SURVEY

- **Suicide**
  - **37% Contemplated suicide**
    - 3.7% (CDC) US National Average
  - **6 % Attempted**
    - .5% (CDC) US National Average



# UNDERSTANDING – SURVEY



# UNDERSTANDING – SURVEY

- **Access and Help**
  - **75% Had workplace access to mental health assistance**
    - 47% said CISM helpful
    - 46% said Private Help helpful
    - 43% said EAP helpful

**BUT!!!**

- *“provider just didn’t get it”*
- *“After we identified that I had a drinking problem, that was all that was focused on. Nothing to do with PTSD”*
- *“No one ever contacted me from EAP”*

# CRITICAL STRESS AND THE EMS LEADER CULTURE

- 48% felt support from management
- 29% of management encouraged seeking of mental health assistance
- 6% of management teams required mental health assistance
- 10% of employers required psychiatric prescreening prior to employment

*“The culture of any organization is shaped by the worst behavior the leader is willing to tolerate.” – Gruenter and Whitaker*

# CRITICAL STRESS AND THE EMS LEADER CULTURE

- **Contemplated Suicide**
  - 56% No Support
  - 23% Full Support
- **Attempted Suicide**
  - 12% No Support
  - 4% Full Support
- **After Critical Stress “did you seek help?”**
  - 30% No Support
  - 52% Full Support



# WHY DO RESPONDERS NOT SEEK HELP?

- **49% Didn't sense a need**
  - Leadership
- **26% Concerned about what others would think**
  - Leadership
- **25% Didn't want it on my employee record**
  - Leadership
- **23% Didn't want to be identified**
  - Leadership
- **11% Help was not available**
  - Leadership

# UNDERSTANDING – EDUCATION

## MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM MODEL



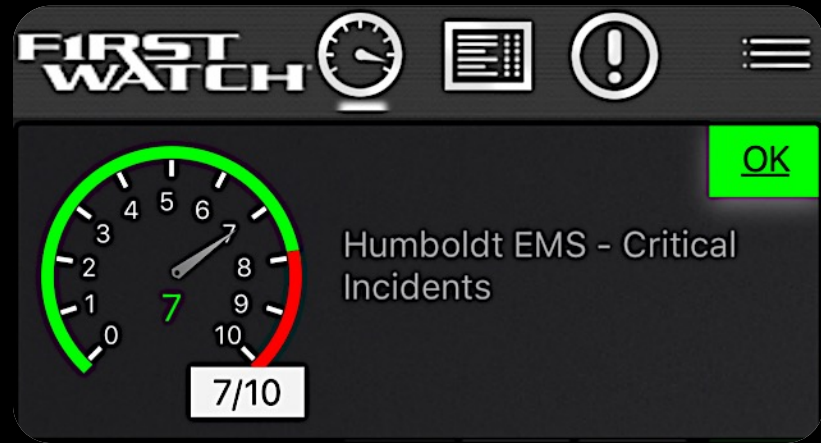
# HUMBOLDT GENERAL HOSPITAL'S PROGRAM

- Leadership Awareness – See Something Say Something
- Education
- First Watch Triggers
- Team approach
- Risk Assessment Tool
- Call Center
- Navigation of the provider
  - EAP
  - CISM
  - Clergy
  - Counseling



# TOOLS

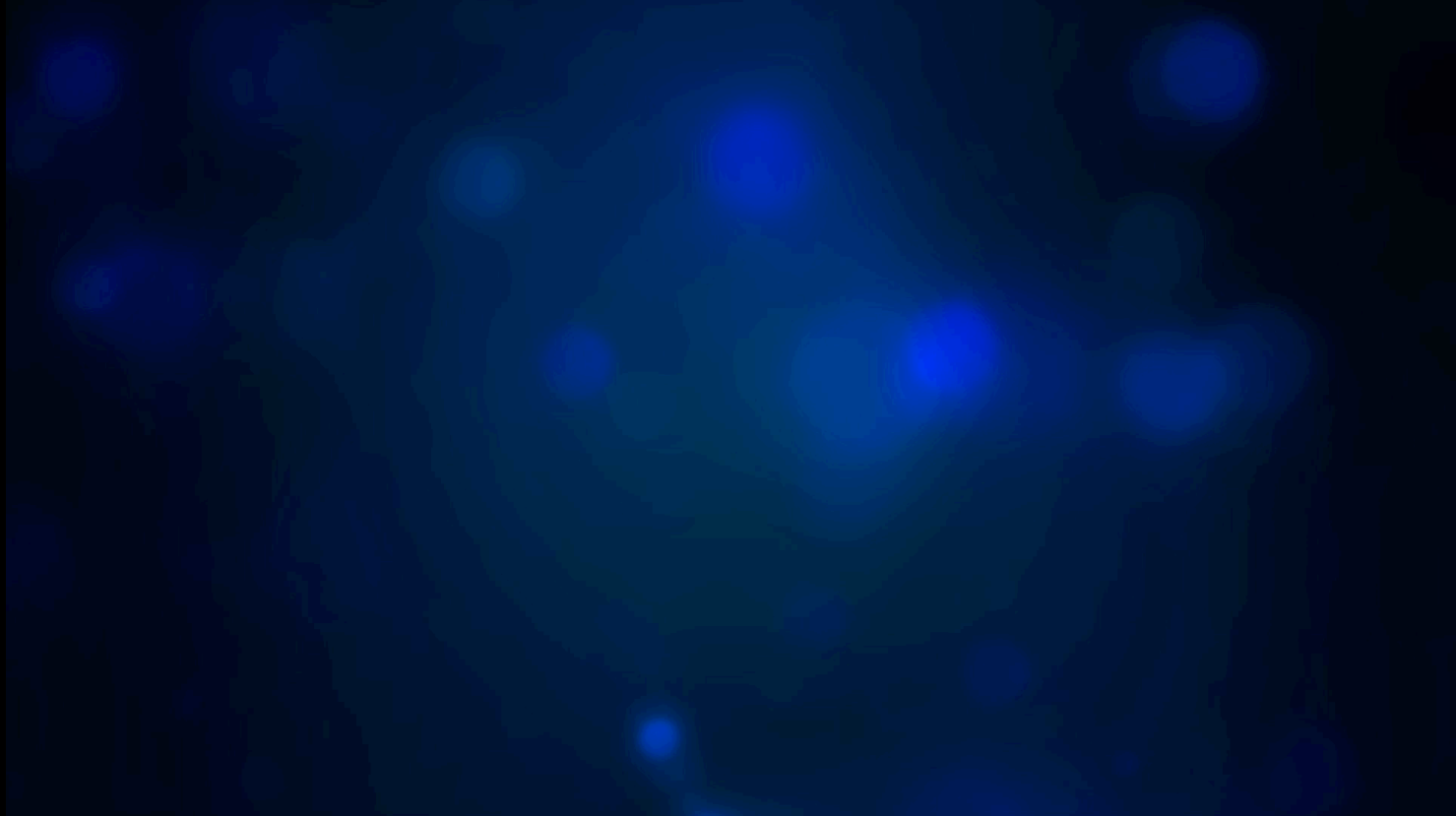
- First Watch
- EAP Programs
- Call Center
- Code Green
- Reviving Responders



*See Something Say Something!*



# ONLY IF



*We can create all kinds of studies to prove we have a problem,  
but we must act now with the knowledge we have if we are  
going to create change and awareness.*

# TAKE HOME POINTS

- Change the Stigma
- Act now/without causing more harm
- Leadership Support is meaningful
- More studies needed by experts



## Missing Virginia Firefighter's Death Ruled a Suicide

Mon, Apr 25, 2016 |

JEFF GOLDBERG, ABC7

Fairfax County firefighter/paramedic Nicole Mittendorf's body was found in a rugged area of Shenandoah National Park

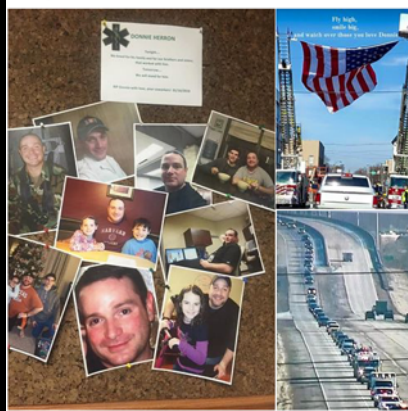


# QUESTIONS?

GREATER  
LOVE  
HATH  
NO MAN



R.I.P. my friend Donnie Herron



## Family says EMS job stress contributed to suicide



## Douglas Casson

Obituary Condolences



Douglas James Casson

Great Falls —Douglas James Casson, 46, of Great Falls, passed away on Wednesday, August 6, 2014 at his residence. Visitation is Tuesday, August 12, from 6-8pm in the Rose Room Chapel at Croxford Funeral Home. The Funeral Service is also at Croxford's, Wednesday, August 13, at 3pm with burial and military honors to follow at Highland Cemetery.

## Ada County Paramedics Cope with Internal Tragedy After Two Commit Suicide

Sorrow spurs new emphasis on mental health

By Jessica Murri



# QUESTIONS?

