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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE / COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES
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EXERCISE NEW HORIZONS

**FROM ZERO TO PTSD – UNRESOLVED STRESS THE SILENT ENEMY TO
OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a way forward in dealing with stress within the Canadian Forces (CF). Stress is a growing concern worldwide and impacts on business, governments and the private sector. Although some stress can be beneficial, unresolved stress can have serious consequences on health, job performance and family life. For this reason, failure to implement strategies to manage stress will likely result in reduced effectiveness within the CF. Although the CF has taken positive steps in dealing with stress including the Chief of Defence Staff Guidance, the implementation of several programs and a proactive health services focused on the health of military personnel, much remains to be done. The leadership must send a consistent message that stress is a part of daily life and not a reflection of abnormality. Service personnel must be educated on symptoms of stress and coping mechanisms. Steps must be put in place to improve the communication between the member, the chain of command and the medical health services. Finally, the success of reducing the financial and personal costs of stress is contingent on ongoing evaluation.

“Most of the solutions advanced to address stress ... address only its symptoms. Little is done to change the source of the problem: work itself. While we recognize that stress is damaging, we act as though its sources were inevitable.”

Robert Karasek¹

INTRODUCTION

Stress is a growing concern around the world and is not unique to the Canadian Forces (CF). Job stress is twice as prevalent now compared to 10 years ago and unless efforts are taken to address this growing concern, it will likely get worse.² The CF has been faced with force reductions; budget cuts and increased commitments in Canada and abroad that has resulted in unwarranted stress to the system and its members.³ “Sick leave associated with burnout has been an increasing problem within the armed forces in recent years, as, until recently, the tempo of assignments has been so overwhelming in relation to resources available.”⁴ For these reasons, providing the tools and strategies to identify and manage stress during a member’s initial training is critical. Unresolved stress can interfere with one’s ability to live a normal life. It can severely impact individuals within the physical and mental health dimensions and reduce operational effectiveness of organizations. Failure to resolve stress has a direct impact on the CF.⁵ As pointed out by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) in his “Guidance to Commanding

¹ Barbara Bailey Reinhold, *Toxic Work: How to Overcome Stress, Overload, and Burnout and Revitalize Your Career* (New York: Penguin Group Penguin Books USA Inc., 1996), 9.

² OMR, “Mental Illness and workplace absenteeism,” <http://oma.org/pcomm/OMR/apr/02returnwork.htm>; Internet; accessed 30 November 2005, 1.

³ Department of National Defence, “1994 White Paper on Defence,” http://www.forces.gc.ca/admpol/eng/doc/51110_e.htm; Internet, accessed 8 April 2006, 1-3.

⁴ Senate, *An Interim Report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence*, The Honourable Colin Kenny, Chair and The Honourable J. Micheal Forrestall, Vice-Chair (Ottawa: Parliamentary Publications Directorate, 2005), 99.

⁵ Department of National Defence, “Stress in the Workplace: A Research Proposal,” Technical Note 15/93, *Canadian Forces Personnel Applied Research Unit* (Toronto: DND, May 1993), 1.

Officers [CO's]", the "management of stress is critical to maintaining the operational readiness and effectiveness of the CF."⁶

Stress is an unavoidable condition in life and can be both good and bad. It is not about tension or the pressure one experiences, but rather the manner in which people react to the changes around them.⁷ Not everyone reacts to stress in the same way. Individuals respond to stress differently given their varied life experiences, level of confidence and their self-respect. Those who deal well with stress have a positive outlook that enables them to handle changes as they evolve and rise above any difficulties they might encounter compared to those who do not. According to the Australian Defence Force (ADF), for those who are troubled by stress, it is important to identify the sources because failure to do so can lead to major health issues and have a significant impact on unit effectiveness and morale.⁸ The CDS expectation for senior leadership in positions of authority is to possess:

... expert knowledge of the stress tolerance capability of their commands and of themselves. At a minimum, CO's must understand the types of stress, the impact of stress on individual and unit functioning, the warning signs of overwhelming stress, prevention techniques, coping mechanisms and the management of casualties due to stress.⁹

⁶ Department of National Defence, "CDS Guidance to Commanding Officers: Chapter 14 – Stress Management," *Canadian Forces Health Services*, http://www.forces.gc.ca/health/information/health_promotion/Engraph/StressManagement_...; Internet; accessed 3 January 2006, 1.

⁷ Department of National Defence, A-MD-050-079/PW-003, "Stress: Take Charge!" A Canadian Forces Program (Ottawa: DND, 2003), 1.15.

⁸ George E. Kearney, "Stress and the military: What have we learned?" *Military Stress and Performance: The Australian Defence Force*, ed. George E. Kearney, Mark Creamer, and Anne Goynes 221- 231 (Carlton Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 221.

⁹ Department of National Defence, "CDS Guidance Commanding Officers," 1.

Implementing the CDS Guidance will take time and effort because there still remain individuals who view stress as a weakness. Until stress is recognized for what it is, it will take time to change old ideas throughout the organization.¹⁰ One approach to gain positive attention would be for those personnel at all rank levels that were exposed to significant stress to come forward and explain how they dealt or could have dealt with their situation. This would help to bring about greater awareness and work towards destigmatizing the idea that those under stress are not normal.¹¹ It is understood that stress exists in all facets of life and will never go away; however, organizations do create unwarranted stress that is avoidable. Poor leadership is one example that can contribute to stress. When looking at the cost in dealing with stress from a purely financial perspective, it makes sense to act with urgency. It was suggested that approximately \$150 billion is spent annually on stress related matters.¹²

This paper will argue that a significant amount of stress goes unresolved in the military and it affects operational capability. Firstly, it will expose the stresses in the military, and then examine the impacts from a personal and professional perspective. Next, a review of the mechanisms currently available to identify and deal with all kinds of stress will be looked at and finally a proposal for the way ahead.

¹⁰ Department of National Defence, "Part One: Prevalence of PTSD within the CF," *Ombudsman*, http://www.ombudsman.forces.gc.ca/reports/special/PTSD-02_e.asp; Internet; accessed 1 March 2006, 19.

¹¹ Department of National Defence, "2004 Survey of Knowledge and Attitudes of Military Personnel Concerning Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD) at a Large Canadian Forces Army Base," Contractor's Report 2005-01, *Director of Human Resources Research and Evaluation* (Ottawa: DND, March 2005), v.

¹² E. Kevin Kelloway, et al, "Poor Leadership," in *Handbook of Work Stress*, ed. Julian Barling, E. Kevin Kelloway and Michael R. Frone, 89-112 (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Inc., 2005), 105.

EXPOSING THE STRESSES IN THE MILITARY

Definitions of Stress

It is important to understand what stress really means. Four definitions are provided below from different sources to show a common theme. Specifically, all individuals have a limit or a coping capacity. When exceeded, it places individuals into stressful situations that if left unattended could have negative repercussions on their mental and physical states and by extension, the organizational effectiveness.

The book “Psychology: Theme and Variations”, defines stress “as any circumstances that threaten or are perceived to threaten one’s well-being and that thereby tax one’s coping abilities.”¹³ S. McShane in his book, “Canadian Organizational Behaviour” defines stress as “an adaptive response that is perceived to be challenging or threatening to the person’s well-being.”¹⁴ In the new military training program manual, “Stress: Take Charge,” it states that “Stress can be anything – if it is happening for the first time, if there is too much of it, if it lasts too long, if it is repeated too often, if it is out of one’s control, or one cannot make sense of it.”¹⁵ And finally, Canada’s National Occupational Health and Safety Resource defines stress as:

... the result of any emotional, physical, social, economic, or other factors that require a response or change. It is generally believed that some stress

¹³ Wayne Weiten, “*Psychology: Themes and Variations*,” 5th ed. (Toronto: Thompson Learning Inc., 2001), 530.

¹⁴ Steven L. McShane, *Canadian Organization Behaviour* 4th ed. (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 2001), 128.

¹⁵ Department of National Defence, A-MD-050-079/PW-003, “Stress: Take Charge!” 1.1.

is okay (sometimes referred to as “challenge” or “positive stress”) but when stress occurs in amounts that you cannot handle, both mental and physical changes may occur.¹⁶

Positive and negative stress can be defined as follows:

Most people think of stressors, or things that cause stress, as negative, such as traffic, a difficult job or divorce. Many people are aware of tense muscles, headaches or stomach aches during, before or after such situations. But stressors can also be positive experiences. Having a baby, bowling a perfect 300 game or completing a satisfying project are all changes that can activate your stress response.¹⁷

Understanding what stress means is the first step in dealing with a growing crisis not only within the military but also in all facets on life (i.e. family, health field, industry, etc.).

Stressors within the Military

The key stressors faced today by the men and women in the military do not receive the attention necessary to fully mitigate unwarranted stress. They are: mobility, loss of a support system, long separations between soldiers and their families, the ability to maintain a balanced lifestyle in a highly dynamic work environment and the internal military culture.¹⁸ In addition, poor leadership¹⁹ at all levels plays a huge role in the level of stress in the workplace. This has been exacerbated by the enormous budget cuts, as

¹⁶ Canada’s National Occupational Health & Safety Resource, “*OSH Answers: Workplace Stress – General*,” <http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/stress.html#print>; Internet; accessed September 28 2005, 7.

¹⁷ Department of National Defence, A-MD-050-079/PW-003, “Stress: Take Charge!” 1.15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.2-5.3.

¹⁹ Kelloway, et al, “Poor Leadership,” 90-91.

highlighted in the 1994 White Papers²⁰, which has taken place over the last 10 to 20 years with no real apparent drop in operational tempo.²¹ Both budget cuts and operational tempo combined are placing enormous stress on the system today. Currently, the military is undergoing transformation at a rapid pace creating significant change in the system while concurrently carrying out all military obligations. This pace in activity is unlikely to slow down in the foreseeable future. If anything, it will increase. The CDS during his comments to the Senate Committee on National Security and Defence in May 2005 stated, “that he has no reason to believe that the government will be less demanding on the Canadian Forces in the decade years than it has been in the last decade.”²²

Doing more with fewer personnel places higher stress on the system and the member’s ability to effectively cope. Although efforts are underway to increase the military by 5000 regular force personnel and 3000 reservists it will take several years to fully train the new recruits. Therefore, the current load on force personnel across the board is not likely to change in any significant way. The Senate Committee on National Security and Defence considers the increased manning level to be “a half-measure at best.”²³ To make matters worse, the demographic group between the ages of 16-34 is expected to be in decline until 2020 meaning fewer recruits and increased stress on the

²⁰ Department of National Defence, “1994 White Paper on Defence,” 2-3.

²¹ Senate, *An Interim Report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence*, 29.

²² *Ibid.*, 12.

²³ *Ibid.*, 12.

organization and military personnel.²⁴ The Department of National Defence/CF Backgrounder issued in October 2002 further amplified the additional stress imposed by the sheer intensity level on some deployments when military careers were already challenged.²⁵ The Standing Senate on National Security and Defence indicated in their 2005 Report that the service was operating 40-45% below the numbers they required.²⁶ Recognizing the military will be very busy in the foreseeable future, it is even more important to understand the impact of the six stressors: mobility, loss of a support system, long separations between soldiers and their families, the ability to maintain a balanced lifestyle in a highly dynamic work environment, the internal military culture and poor leadership. This will be important in order to gain a better appreciation of the role stress plays within the CF and the need to implement measures that would reduce negative stresses at both the organizational and individual levels.

Firstly, mobility can have a positive and negative impact depending on the circumstances and the frequency of moves. Those personnel who can influence where they will be posted next can greatly mitigate stress for themselves and the member's family. Conversely, leaving the member out of the loop could contribute to a negative outcome. Postings are extremely stressful and getting it right reduces stresses and facilitates transition to a new environment in a systematic fashion thus aiding families in

²⁴ Senate, *An Interim Report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence*, 99.

²⁵ Department of National Defence, "DND/CF: Backgrounder: Operational Stress Injury Social Support Project." http://www.forces.gc.ca/site/newsroom/view_news_e.asp?id=427, Internet; accessed 9/25/2005, 1.

²⁶ Senate, *An Interim Report of the Standing Senate Committee on National Security and Defence*, 11-13.

adapting to their new communities, schools and friends, which is never easy. Failing that the stress on the family and by extension the member increases.²⁷

Secondly, the loss of a support system has a major impact on stress. Moving away from the extended family and friends for many is traumatic. It means missing out on special occasions and events. Loss of a second income and the lack of suitable spousal employment at the new destination can make life extremely difficult especially for those who have become accustomed to a certain income level. In addition, moving into more affluent neighbourhoods could make matters even worse. For the spouse, not securing employment could impact on their self-worth. In addition, the ability for family members to secure the services of doctor when physicians are in short supply further frustrates their situation.²⁸

Thirdly, the length of separations between soldiers and families especially with recurring deployments happening in a short period of time can have a major impact. Separation for some has led to divorce. The ability of the members and families to cope with separation can become unbearable and unsustainable after a period of time. Reintegration is not always easy either. Military life must be properly balanced with family life to ensure soldiers remain focused on their responsibilities. This is easier when the family is doing well.²⁹

²⁷ Department of National Defence, A-MD-050-079/PW-003, "Stress: Take Charge!" 5.2.

²⁸ Ibid., 5.2.

²⁹ Ibid., 5.2.

Fourthly, the ability to maintain a balanced lifestyle in a highly dynamic work environment is no easy task. The Duxbury / Higgins Report (Carleton University) states that the number one “stress for the military is not enough time with the family, and long work hours.”³⁰ According the Work-Life Balance study, the work-to-family impacts are considered higher in the CF compared to other sectors.³¹ Transformation and operational duties are placing high stress on individuals and the expectations are high. It becomes more important then ever before for senior leadership to ensure the tempo of military life is balanced and that demanding challenges remain momentary surges and not the status quo. Over the last 20 years, research suggests workload has gone up by 30% and has taken its toll on the work force resulting in many going home each night completely exhausted. Given the intensity of work, it becomes even more critical to ensure a reasonable work pace and workload. It requires good leaders with foresight and vision that are able to effectively adjust and provide subordinates with the tools they need to adequately perform their jobs within a reasonable work schedule.³²

Fifthly, the internal military culture is a major stressor. Many personnel who are experiencing stress or other related illnesses perceive themselves as being viewed unfavourably by the system in general within all rank levels. Society in general views stress and illness as a form of weakness, an interpretation that could not be more further from the truth.

³⁰ Department of National Defence, A-MD-050-079/PW-003, “Stress: Take Charge!” 5.2.

³¹ Department of National Defence, “Work-Life Balance in the Canadian Forces & Department of National Defence,” D Strat HR Research Note PR 01/2004, *Assistant Deputy Minister (Human Resources-Military)* (Ottawa: DND, February 2004), v.

³² Kelloway, et al, “Poor Leadership,” 96.

We are abandoning people, instead of banding together as a regiment should, because we are afraid of weakness. When Roméo Dallaire came forward, some senior officers said of him that he's "always been emotional," and to them "emotional" is considered a weakness.³³

Experiencing stress is a normal reaction to challenging situations that exceeds someone's comfort zone.³⁴ People suffer in silence because they are not confident enough to come forward. Cpl McEachern, indicated that he was aware of several members who felt they were under stress but remained silent because they were afraid of the consequences of bringing their concerns out into the open.³⁵ Such attitudes prevent personnel from seeking the help they need before their situation becomes even more serious.

Finally, poor leadership can create serious stress levels in subordinates. Evidence suggests leaders who are abusive or simply passive in nature create unwarranted stress that might be the root cause of stress within organizations.³⁶ This reinforces the necessity to develop good leaders through education.

In the December 2002 the "Follow-up Report Review of DND/CF Actions on Operational Stress Injuries," the ombudsman indicated that there was little progress in terms of how peers viewed each other with respect to stress. Further, he felt the high

³³ Department of National Defence, "Part One: Prevalence of PTSD within the CF," 22.

³⁴ Donald Meichenbaum, "*Stress Inoculation Training: A Twenty Year Update*" (Waterloo: University of Waterloo, October 1991), 4.

³⁵ Department of National Defence, "Systematic Treatment of CF members with PTSD Complaint: Christian McEachern," *Ombudsman*, http://www.ombudsman.forces.gc.ca/reports/special/PTSD-toc_e.asp; Internet; accessed 3 January 2006, 5. Cpl McEachern at the time of his comments was a young soldier and former member of the 1st Battalion of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (1 PPCLI) who was diagnosed with PTSD in the fall of 1997 and released from the CF in July 2001.

³⁶ Kelloway, et al, "Poor Leadership," 90-91.

workloads and personnel shortages would continue to make it difficult to change many members' false perception of stress. He also indicated at that time that the units were not requesting the outreach training that he believed would contribute significantly to changing people's attitudes towards operational stress injuries. "Many CF members are still reluctant to come forward and seek treatment, and in some areas, treatment is difficult to access."³⁷ Until the stigma of stress is removed, service personnel will not be willing to come forward and seek help. As a result, there is likely to be a greater impact on operational effectiveness and reduced morale:

Our military population still resists the idea of seeking mental health assistance in the early stages of personal problems, says Maj Bourassa. Our ultimate goal, as a health and wellness promotion team, is to fight taboos of this sort and erase the false perception that seeking help for a personal or mental problem is a sign of weakness.³⁸

Stressors in the military must be taken seriously. Failure to do so will continue to impact negatively on operations thereby placing further stress on the system.

Symptoms of Stress

Understanding the symptoms of stress is important especially for leaders at all levels and personnel under their charge who play a key role in the effective management of personnel resources. It is important that these individuals receive the training and

³⁷ Department of National Defence, "Follow-up Report Review of DND/CF Actions on Operational Stress Injuries," *Ombudsman*, http://www.ombudsman.forces.gc.ca/reports/special/OSI-01_e.asp; Internet; accessed 3 January 2006, 3-4.

³⁸ Najwa Asmar, "Mental Health Week: CF members encouraged to "practice mind and body fitness,"" *The Maple Leaf*, 27 April 2005, 5.

education necessary so they possess the tools to identify, mitigate and manage stress effectively within their units. Education and training can help remove any negative stigma associated with stress. It may be determined that the cause of stress is a symptom of a larger organizational issue that warrants immediate attention and resolution and not specific to an individual or individuals. A better knowledge and understanding of the men and women under command can promote higher levels of operational effectiveness. Until everyone fully recognizes the impact of stress, the morale and health of the institution will not be optimized fully. Some of the symptoms of stress one can encounter include: insomnia, irritability, headaches, chest pains, anxiety, lack of focus and fatigue.

EXAMINING THE IMPACTS OF STRESS FROM A PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVE

It is important to understand the gravity of stress and what it can do to someone in order to realize why organizations have a responsibility to mitigate it in the workplace. Stress can impact one's ability to perform their day-to-day activities. It could lead to anger, frustration, and illnesses such as high blood pressure and heart disease. Unidentified or unresolved stress may even lead to more serious problems such as depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues and disorders. For some, they may experience a lack of concentration or an inability to perform their job, which may have huge consequences on operations. Some members may even turn to substance abuse further complicating their situation. A member's inability to perform their job may increase the workload and pressure of others leading to poor unit morale. Studies have

shown that to be the case as articulated by Jennifer Kavanagh³⁹ in her review of the military. In fact, these studies suggest that the impact of stress created by an increased workload is greater at the group level than the individual level creating a domino effect.

The only solution in dealing with stress is to accept stress for what it is and work together to build a productive and healthy organization. Until this is done, members under stress will be reluctant to open up and deal with the problem for fear of retribution from their superiors, peers and subordinates. The military realizes that operational effectiveness does not only include concrete measures such as weapon, vehicles, and equipment states but also includes psychological aspects such as the members state of mind, their morale, their exposure to stress, and methods used to cope with stress.⁴⁰ Knowing is not enough. It is time to act and dispel any misunderstanding or misconceptions of stress at all levels in the organization.

According to ADF,⁴¹ the role of leadership is critical because it is through the chain of command that confidence is inspired, morale developed and effective communication within the unit established and maintained. This requires commanders to be responsible for the occupational health and safety of their personnel. For commanders to be effective, it is important that they receive training and education to ensure they

³⁹ Jennifer Kavanagh, *Stress and Performance: A Review of the Literature and Its Applicability to the Military* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2005), 19-20.

⁴⁰ Department of National Defence, "DHRRE: OEL addresses psychological side of units, Operations," *Canadian Forces Personnel Newsletter*, Issue 1/03 – 29 January 2003, http://www.forces.gc.ca/hr/cfpn/engraph/1_03/1_03_dhrre-oel_e.asp; Internet; accessed 7 February 2006, 1-3.

⁴¹ Peter J. Murphy, "The stress of deployment," *Military Stress and Performance: The Australian Defence Force*, ed. George E. Kearney, Mark Creamer, and Anne Goyne 3 - 18 (Carlton Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 12.

possess the skill sets to effectively identify the signs and symptoms of stress.⁴² Leaders cannot do this alone. Accessing additional personnel resources including padres, nurses, doctors and social workers would assist commanders in dealing with stress management.⁴³

REVIEWING THE MECHANISMS CURRENTLY AVAILABLE TO IDENTIFY AND DEAL WITH ALL KINDS OF STRESS

The health and well being of CF members is paramount. The CF has established several programs and resources to assist members who are experiencing stress. In February 2006, the CF introduced a new program entitled Stress: Take Charge to help personnel better cope with stress. The main goal of the program is to support participants in developing coping strategies to effectively manage their stress while at the same time enhancing performance.⁴⁴ Other programs, facilities and services provided within DND and the CF include the Military Assistance Program, the Quality and Life Program, the Operational Trauma Stress Support Centres, the Military Family Resource Centre and the medical support services. But these programs albeit good, require the member to self-initiate/self-identify. Unfortunately, due to the perceived stigma surrounding stress, many personnel have been reluctant to seek help. It is through training and education that the stigma related to stress could be extinguished over time and in the process build confidence in members to seek help when they need it.

⁴² Peter J. Murphy, "The stress of deployment ," 12.

⁴³ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁴ Department of National Defence, A-MD-050-079/PW-003, "Stress: Take Charge!" 0.1.

THE WAY AHEAD

General

Looking to the way ahead, there are four key areas that require attention in order to reduce stress within the CF and enhance operational effectiveness and individual health. First, the leadership must play an important role in changing the stigma towards those who have exceeded their coping capacity to manage stress and to promote an acceptance that stress “is not abnormal and not a sign that they are “going crazy” or “losing their minds”, rather their distressing symptoms reflect a normal reaction to a difficult situation.”⁴⁵ Second, education must play a fundamental part in developing awareness about stress, how to protect oneself from it and removing the stigma and false perceptions about what stress is and is not. Third, an effective communication triad between the member, the medical facility and the chain of command is critical to ensure the interests of the member and organization is properly served. Finally, the implementation of an evaluation process is required to validate the effectiveness of the previous three key areas.

Leadership

Stress can be both positive and negative and for leaders, it is important to understand what stress means and how it can impact on soldiers whether doing domestic

⁴⁵ Donald Meichenbaum, “*Stress Inoculation Training: A Twenty Year Update*,” 4.

or international operations. According to S. McShane:

People are stressed from overwork, job insecurity, information overload, and the increasing pace of life. These events produce distress – the degree of physiological, psychological, and behaviour deviation from healthy function. There is also a positive side of stress, called *eustress*, which refers to the healthy, positive, constructive outcome of stressful events and the stress response. Eustress is the stress experience in moderation, enough to activate and motivate people so that they can achieve goals, change their environments, and succeed in life’s challenges. In other words, we need some stress to survive.⁴⁶

Stress is no different than the common cold in the sense that everyone is prone to it given the right conditions. Today there are several good programs that deal with stress but these programs alone are not enough. They, in and by themselves, do not eliminate the stigma of stress that exists at all rank levels within the CF. According to Dr. Jeff Whitehead, epidemiologist, DCOS, Force Health Protection, “There is still a stigma attached to mental illness across society. We have to find ways to overcome that so people seek out and get help they need.”⁴⁷ Colonel Cameron, the CF Surgeon General states that:

Mental health issues are assuming increasing prominence throughout Canadian society ... It is critical to a successful recovery that CF members be able to access the care they need within the CF health care system, and that they be able to deal with their problems within the context of the CF. This is especially true for operational stress injuries.⁴⁸

Other military forces have recognized the need to seriously examine stress and determine ways to improve their operational effectiveness and health of service

⁴⁶ Steven L. McShane, *Canadian Organization Behaviour*, 128-129.

⁴⁷ Department of National Defence, “Statistics Canada CF Mental Health Survey: A ‘Milestone,’” *Canadian Forces Health Services* (Ottawa: DND, 2002), 17.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

personnel. In particular, the Armed Forces in the United Kingdom⁴⁹ have recognized that many service personnel do not seek help when they are under enormous stress due to potential career implication. In addition, they are concerned how they might be viewed within their organization, and what impact their situation may have on being promoted. One recommendation that came forward required a better understanding in the way commanders reacted to members under stress⁵⁰

Everyone needs to understand that stress is a normal biological function and those who exceed their tolerance to cope deserve nothing less than support of the chain of command, peers and subordinates, in-house programs (i.e. Military Assistance Programs) and a medical support system when required. Within the CF, the negative perception of stress must be changed. The stigma can no longer be accepted in mainstream thinking. More than ever, leaders must take up their responsibility to be educated on stress and to educate their personnel. Leaders at all levels need to be held accountable for the maintenance of a healthy work environment. The CDS has given clear guidance on the way forward and now senior leaders must provide a consistent approach and positive message in the management of stress within the whole organization that is fully understood and accepted.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Department of National Defence, "Psychological Disorders in the CF Legal and Social Issues," Contractor's Report 2004-01, *Director of Human Resources Research and Evaluation* (Ottawa: DND, March 2004), 36-37.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

⁵¹ Department of National Defence, "CDS Guidance to Commanding Officers," 1.

Education

Educating personnel on stress will not only assist them in better handling stressful situations, but to be more accepting of others overexposed to stress. It must be based on a long-term investment if the real benefits of an accepting organization are to be realized. Stress training must incorporate a basic training program for all personnel and additional training in the form of specific training tailored for personnel performing in a leadership role. Other agencies have reaped the benefits of a proactive approach in dealing with stress and related psychological disorders. For example, a survey of Canadian Uniformed Services⁵² (i.e. police, firefighters, and ambulance personnel) was done that showed these services were working hard to develop a tolerant organization when assessing stress and related psychological disorders. They implemented effective programs (i.e. Critical Incident Stress Services (CISS) and the Employee Assistance Program) that facilitated a greater understanding and acceptance of personnel who were suffering. Of note, CISS was a mandatory program for those involved in an incident and it emphasized to personnel that stress in the work environment is common. Many respondents surveyed agreed. However, despite the efforts to promote an effective organization and healthy workforce, there exist within the Canadian Uniformed Services some reservations that the policy does not reflect what is applied in practice. According to CF policy, personnel are not to be discriminated against; yet in reality, several members felt that their promotion might be impacted if they were seen as unable to handle the pressure of work.⁵³ All the more reason why refresher training is important for everyone to remind them of the types

⁵² Department of National Defence, "Psychological Disorders in the CF Legal and Social Issues," 40-42.

⁵³ Ibid., 40-43.

of stress, coping techniques, programs and services available, and the importance to destigmatize any misconceptions about stress.⁵⁴

Education of stress is a necessity for all members enrolling in the military. It must be designed to provide personnel with: a better understanding of the differences between operational and non operational stressors, the consequences of exposure, the preventative measures to guard against stress, the resources available to assist members experiencing too much stress and most importantly, removing any stigma based on false perceptions.⁵⁵

Training is a precursor to effectively dealing with stress. Understanding the symptoms and effects of stress can help people cope and teach them to remain tolerant and accepting of those struggling with stress. It must be a starting point with plans to implement refresher training. This would give personnel the skill sets to properly manage stress throughout their careers and in the process enhance overall operations, build trust and confidence while striving to minimize the impact of stress on the system and individuals.⁵⁶ By providing members with education in stress management, they would be empowered to become more productive and committed to the system without the fear of negative repercussions during stressful times.

vi. ⁵⁴ Department of National Defence, “Psychological Disorders in the CF Legal and Social Issues,”

⁵⁵ Ibid., 32-33.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 45.

Leaders at all levels require additional training to expand their understanding of stress and how best to manage their organization during stressful periods.⁵⁷ Part of this training needs to ensure all leaders understand the importance they play in setting a high example in properly managing stress within their area of responsibility. This will be critical in helping personnel gain confidence that the policies reflect the realities. Personnel must believe that their actions will not become their worse fear (i.e. have a negative impact on future promotions or possible release). Leaders play a major role through their actions.

Communication

Although there are mechanisms in place to accommodate members requiring medical attention, the linkages between the member, the medical facility and the chain of command are often disjointed. CO's may not always be given current information on the status of their personnel and that can hugely impact on his/her ability to effectively run their operations. Health Care Providers and the CO's need to work closer together, while respecting the requirement for medical confidentiality and patient-doctor privileges in order to ensure that the best interests of the members receiving care is taken into consideration. This is a critical piece in developing trust and confidence in those members who are receiving care particularly when returning to work. CO's play a pivotal role in creating a dynamic and tolerant organization and in order to achieve this; they need to be part of the overall solution. There is a need for enhanced communication

⁵⁷ Department of National Defence, "Psychological Disorders in the CF Legal and Social Issues," vi.

between the CO's and medical community regarding members receiving medical care. A communication triad would provide the linkages needed to bring together the member, the health system and chain of command. It would require all parties to play an active part in the exchange of information.

Evaluation

Evaluation is a critical component to feed the system with relevant data with which to inform the chain of command. It provides a mechanism to ensure the key areas: leadership, education, and effective communication are in place to mitigate the negative effects of stress. For example, has the stigma/culture associated with stress within the CF changed? Are the programs/training and services offered to members of the CF relevant, accessible and are they being used? The evaluation could include re-surveying the CF population by using the Health and Lifestyle of Canadian Forces Members Survey and reviewing applicable statistics and data available through the medical community on members dealing with stress.

Summary

In summary, good leadership is essential to changing attitudes about stress. It's about understanding what stress is and how to recognize when someone is under stress. In addition, leaders must ensure their personnel are always provided the support they require to deal with stress. Education helps everyone understand stress and provides a basic knowledge that can only increase tolerance and acceptance. Leaders require

specific training to better enable them to deal with stress effectively within their organization in order to build trust and confidence in their subordinates. Refresher training is key in reminding personnel about the different types of stress, the ways to handle stress, where to seek help, and to remove and to dispel any false perceptions. To bring everything together, the communication triad between the members, the health community and the chain of command would demonstrate to those members' under stress that everyone is working hard to assist them in their recovery. Finally, an evaluation to feed the system with relevant data with which to inform the chain of command on the key areas: leadership, education, and effective communication should be implemented.

CONCLUSION

The Canadian Forces is committed to the health and welfare of its members. It recognizes that stress is a concern and can have negative consequences and huge costs to the system and its members if it is not addressed. The CDS Guidance to Commanding Officers has emphasized the expectation and the importance for senior leaders to understand stress and the impact it has on operational effectiveness.

This paper has argued that a significant amount of stress continues to go unresolved in the military. It is clear that all members are susceptible to stress and that left unresolved could have a significant impact on both the organization and the

members. Recognizing when oneself or a co-worker is under stress and knowing how to seek help when applicable can assist members in returning to a less stressful life sooner.

To progress, the CF will require sound leadership that sends a consistent message that stress is no different than getting the common cold and strategies can be implemented to effectively mitigate and manage stress. A proactive approach throughout the chain of command will send the message that individuals are important and valued. It will also reduce the high cost of decreased productivity, improve unit effectiveness and reduce attrition. In addition, it will enhance organizational effectiveness within the CF. Educating the force is the best way to de-stigmatize stress and teach personnel strategies to minimize the stress factors that we experience everyday.⁵⁸ Developing a communication triad will ensure members receive the support they need from their chain of command and medical support provider. Finally, an evaluation process will determine the effectiveness of the implementation of CDS Guidance to Commanding Officers.

⁵⁸ Jonathan Forester, M.D., "Conquering Chronic Fatigue," (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 2003), 64.

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