



# FORCE SCIENCE<sup>®</sup> NEWS

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## New wellness center: Stress/substance abuse therapy for cops only

### I. New wellness center: Stress/substance abuse therapy for cops only

An innovative medical treatment facility, exclusively for LEOs burdened by substance abuse, stress overload, marital problems, or other wellness-threatening issues, is scheduled to open within the next few months, not far from the Force Science Training headquarters in a Chicago suburb.

Dubbed St. Michael’s House, after the archangel patron of warriors, the special, nondenominational facility will occupy the entire floor of a private medical center and offer both residential and out-patient services for officers and their families.

The concept originated with the Des Plaines (IL) Police Dept., but the facility will be open to LEOs from any location, according to Des Plaines Chief William Kushner.



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The facility is currently being renovated to create a “welcoming, non-institutional atmosphere” and is expected to be functional by the end of the summer, Kushner told Force Science News. The host medical center will be publicly identified at that time.

**HORROR STORY MOTIVATOR.** The hellish experiences of an officer on another suburban department planted the seeds for creating the facility.

A few years ago, that officer was assigned to deal with the media after his agency became the focus of international attention during an extremely high-profile murder investigation. Working long hours on little sleep and under intense and unrelenting pressure from his department and reporters, the officer eventually broke down to the point of contemplating suicide.

Sent for psychiatric treatment, he then lost his firearms privileges and, consequently, his job. Unemployed and with a wife and two small children, he also lost his house. And to his shock, he lost the support of his former fellow officers—even close friends—who, for the most part, treated him as a pariah.

“In short,” says Victoria Poklop, a victim-assistance counselor with 20 years on Des Plaines PD, “he lost everything.”

After reading about his ordeal, Poklop tracked him down where he’d found a job out of state with the help of relatives, working corporate security for a department store chain. In his spare time, “he was educating cops on wellness issues,” she recalls.

They talked for hours, brainstorming ideas. “He was very inspirational,” Poklop says. “But what happened to him should never happen to any officer.”

Back home, with the help of Sgt. John Rice of the Des Plaines investigations division and the enthusiastic support of her then boss, Cmdr. Randy Akin, and Chief Kushner, she set about fashioning an impressive in-house wellness/mental health program, including an active peer-support team and a network of vetted professional therapists attuned to the nuances of working productively with LEOs.

The next logical step seemed to be to establish a full-fledged treatment facility where officers could seek help for toxic stress, alcohol or drug abuse, marital problems, and other therapy issues with privacy from the civilian world.

**PROTECTIVE ATMOSPHERE.** Across nearly four decades of policing, Kushner has more than once encountered what he considers a fatal flaw in many substance abuse programs: “Cops in rehab sometimes find themselves in groups with people they’ve pinched for selling drugs.” Obviously not the most conducive atmosphere for corrective self-disclosure and renewal.

Yet, the need is great; he estimates that some 15% of officers have a substance abuse issue. So in finding a wellness facility that would include abuse treatment, law enforcement exclusivity became a paramount concern. “In effect,” Kushner says, “we wanted a safety zone for cops.”

With the backing of nearly 30 other police administrators Kushner had contacted, he and Poklop earlier this year approached a major, multi-story medical center in Des Plaines that operates a successful rehab program—and where the marketing director is a former officer. They asked if perhaps some limited space could be set aside to accommodate a law enforcement-only clientele.

The center's CEO, whose family tree also includes a law enforcement branch, countered by offering an entire floor.

**UNIQUE MIX.** In collaboration with the center, Kushner, Poklop, and Rice have worked out what they believe is a unique holistic menu of services and a nurturing setting “where cops can feel comfortable with other cops,” in the chief's words.

When the current renovation is complete, the special floor—“St. Michael's House”—will feature 20 spacious residential rooms, a family visitation area, meeting space, and out-patient consultation and treatment offices, plus access to workout equipment.

Services will include psychological counseling, substance abuse rehabilitation and recovery coaching, stress and trauma treatment, marriage counseling, massage therapy, nutrition guidance, brain mapping, Reiki healing, pet therapy, medication, meditation, physical therapy, mindfulness training, and other wellness approaches, all tailored specifically to law enforcement.

Any LEO or family member is eligible to participate. Details are being worked out so that insurance plans will be universally accepted. Record-keeping will be minimal, and the floor will not operate as a locked

facility. Admission or out-patient visits will not jeopardize an officer's professional firearms status, Kushner says—“and that is hugely important.”

“A crisis usually hits an officer at a most inappropriate time,” Poklop says. “We want to have a system in place that allows an officer to transition seamlessly into a helpful response.”

**MODEL PROGRAM.** Initial response to word of the new facility has been strongly positive, even from agencies with a mere handful of officers. “People tend to think of big departments with high call loads as being stressful,” Kushner says, “but stressors really are consistent across the board in law enforcement. And we in policing have turned a blind eye to some of these stress-related problems for decades.”

Indeed, he can remember an era early in his career when an officer with an alcohol problem might show up for work drunk. “His gun would be secured and he'd be put in a cell to sleep it off.”

He's hopeful that the Des Plaines facility will serve as a model for a far better approach that's emulated nationwide.

We'll report more details when St. Michael's House opens officially. In the meantime, for more information or for help with a current emergency, contact Victoria Poklop at: [vpoklop@desplaines.org](mailto:vpoklop@desplaines.org) or Chief Kushner at: [bkushner@desplaines.org](mailto:bkushner@desplaines.org).

## **II. FS researchers inform academics on realities of policing**

Researchers with the Force Science Institute continue to bring a realistic perspective on

law enforcement issues to the largely civilian academic community.

Dr. John O'Neill and Dr. Dawn O'Neill of the Force Science staff made separate presentations in Denver recently at the annual convention of the prestigious Assn. of Behavior Analysis International. The convention attracted thousands of scientists, academics, and practitioners from throughout the world.

Both O'Neills are also scheduled to speak in September at the annual Society of Police and Criminal Psychology conference in San Diego.

At the ABAI gathering, John O'Neill chaired the only symposium devoted to law enforcement topics. He reported on a Force Science study currently underway to assess the retention imprint made by police training.

Evaluating the experiences of recruits at several academies, he said, researchers are finding, for example, that within eight weeks of learning "simple" skills such as mandibular pressure-point control the ability to apply them tends to "degrade significantly," while the performance of more complex skills like handcuffing frequently suffers a significant decline as soon as one week after instruction.

Currently, the findings document, not all recruits are "performing to the point of mastery" for important DT techniques and some of the fault may lie with outdated teaching methods, O'Neill said. A full, peer-reviewed report on this groundbreaking study is expected within the next few months.

In her presentation, Dawn O'Neill described Force Science's research into several hundred unintended discharges across multiple agencies, exploring how and when they occur, the most common settings, officer behavior immediately before the UD, the types of firearms typically involved, and their threat potential.

Most often, she explained, UDs occur in low-stress environments rather than during high-stress threat confrontations. And overwhelmingly they can be prevented by following basic safety procedures and keeping the finger indexed outside the trigger guard. Her findings, too, will be described fully in a peer-reviewed paper in the near future.

At the San Diego conference, Sept. 13-16, John O'Neill will give an update on the learning retention studies, while Dawn O'Neill will present findings from a Force Science survey about public perceptions of police use-of-force dynamics.

In that study, some 500 young-adult civilians were asked their perception of various critical factors surrounding force events, such as training, dispatching, frequency, speed of assault, shooting dynamics, officer memory, etc.

The findings confirm what cops commonly believe: the public's perception of police use of force is highly unrealistic. Respondents, for example, significantly "over-estimated the prevalence of force, the hours of training devoted to de-escalation and communication, and the speed at which assaults occur."

O'Neill hopes to expand this research in coming months in an effort to improve police-public relations by helping civilians more accurately understand the realities of use-of-force encounters.

### **III. Free: UOF-related quick study guides for training reinforcement**

Law enforcement officers are involved with an endless variety of encounters, and some of these are relatively rare or very rare indeed.

For instance, Atty. Michael Brave, always popular at ILEETA conferences and other training events for his remarkably detailed, rapid-fire legal updates, points out that on average “for every 71 LEO encounters there will be one use or threatened use of force, and for every 1,000 uses of force there will be one time-associated death.”

Thus, he says, given these comparative infrequencies, “it’s helpful for officers to have study aids to refresh their training, to guide their responses in street situations, to reference after an encounter before generating reports or statements, and to review before grand jury appearances, depositions, and trial testimony.”

Brave has recently created three one-page aids in collaboration with “a significant number of highly knowledgeable authorities” that you can access free of charge and print out for roll call distribution or other training or use purposes.

Click [here](http://www.ecdlaw.info/Study_Aid_CEW) or visit: [www.ecdlaw.info/Study\\_Aid\\_CEW](http://www.ecdlaw.info/Study_Aid_CEW) for a “rapid study guide” on Conducted Electrical Weapon use

Click [here](http://www.ecdlaw.info/Study_Aid_4th_UoF) or visit: [www.ecdlaw.info/Study\\_Aid\\_4th\\_UoF](http://www.ecdlaw.info/Study_Aid_4th_UoF) for a basic review of the 4th Amendment’s Objective Reasonableness Standard and qualified immunity

Click [here](http://www.ecdlaw.info/Study_Aid_Timeline_Cklist) or visit: [www.ecdlaw.info/Study\\_Aid\\_Timeline\\_Cklist](http://www.ecdlaw.info/Study_Aid_Timeline_Cklist) for a practical template for recording an “accurate and verifiable” critical incident timeline for investigations.

For more information, Brave can be reached at: [brave@laaw.com](mailto:brave@laaw.com)

### **IV. In our in-box: Warning shots at an historic law enforcement siege**

After our recent reports on the pros and cons of warning shots [see Force Science News #336 and #339], we received the following account of how one warning-shot skeptic resorted to firing two such discharges during an historic 71-day law enforcement siege:

I generally agree that warning shots should be avoided. However, I fired warning shots twice from my M16 rifle during the American Indian Movement pocket insurrection and takeover of the town of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota in 1973.

Sit 1: At a roadblock, myself and two other federal agents were rendering first aid to another agent who had been shot in the arm. As we waited for backup and a med evac, a sedan approached from Wounded Knee. I stepped out to wave the car down. It continued to advance.

Not knowing the occupants' intentions and affiliation, I fired a shot over the top of the vehicle from approximately 150 yards. Vehicle stopped and occupants bailed out and took cover on each side of the road. Reinforcements arrived and occupants were no longer a concern.

Sit 2: Roadblock came under attack by fire during the night. Agents were pruned out, returning fire with M16s. As I ran to take a position near the other agents, two cars with lights out approached the roadblock at high speeds. I waved them to stop, but they kept coming directly at me.

I fired one round over the top of the first vehicle and they stopped. I detained four AIM members who were trying to run the

block while the agents were pinned down, so they could join the insurrectionists.

Things were different out there, and we were functioning like light infantry and had National Guard APCs and helos at our disposal. Not sure I was legally justified firing warning shots under FBI deadly force doctrine, but if possible I wanted to avoid bloodshed for many reasons, including political.

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Written by Force Science Institute  
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