

COVINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

Subject: MENTAL ILLNESS

Date of Issue: 07-01-2005

Number of Pages: 6

Policy No. P240

Review Date: 06-01-2007

Distribution: Departmental

Revision Date: 01-14-2016

I. Purpose

To establish guidelines for officers to follow when dealing with persons exhibiting mental illness; also known as EDP (emotionally disturbed person).

II. Statement of Policy

It shall be the policy of the Covington Police Department to be committed to handling mentally ill persons in an effective manner to minimize injury to the person being dealt with as well as the employees involved. Only medically qualified professionals are qualified to diagnose and treat mental illness. Basic guidelines for the recognition of individuals potentially suffering from mental illness are offered in this directive as a resource for agency personnel.

III. Discussion

Mental illness is the 4th leading disability in the United States with estimates of anywhere from 3% to 10% of the population affected. Unlike mental retardation, mental illness can occur at any time in a person's life. Dealing with individuals in enforcement and related contexts who are known or suspected to be mentally ill carries the potential for violence, requires an officer to make difficult judgments about the mental state and intent of the individual, and requires special police skills and abilities to effectively and legally deal with the person so as to avoid unnecessary violence and potential civil litigation. Given the unpredictable and sometimes violent nature of the mentally ill, officers should never compromise or jeopardize their safety or the safety of others when dealing with individuals displaying symptoms of mental illness. Officers shall use this policy to assist them in defining whether a person's behavior is indicative of mental illness and dealing with the mentally ill in a constructive and humane manner.

IV. Definition

Mental Illness - A disorder of thought or mood which significantly impairs judgment, behavior, capacity to recognize reality, or ability to cope with the ordinary demands of life. Mental illness can occur at any time during a person's life and may be long lasting, or it may be a short-lived episode. Some forms of mental illness are treatable and controllable.

V. Procedures

A. Recognizing Abnormal Behavior

1. Mental illness is often difficult for even the trained professional to define in a given individual. Officers are not expected to make judgments of mental or emotional disturbance, but rather to recognize behavior that is potentially destructive and/or dangerous to self or others.
2. Listed below are recognition signs of possible mental illness in a person:
 - a. Significant changes in a person's behavior.
 - b. A statement by others that the impaired person is not acting like they normally do.
 - c. They may behave in a way dangerous to themselves or to others.
 - d. They may withdraw into themselves, talking only to themselves.
 - e. They complain of seeing visions, smelling strange odors or hearing voices.
 - f. The impaired person may have unrealistic ideas about themselves.
 - g. They may believe that they are someone they obviously are not.
 - h. They may believe that they are worthless (e.g. extreme depression).
 - i. They may have delusions (e.g. unrealistic ideas) about the world.
 - j. They may exaggerate events that occur.
 - k. They may have strange losses of memory or don't know the time, where they are or who they are.

B. Interaction with a Person Who May be Suffering From Mental Illness

1. When officers encounter someone who is exhibiting symptoms of mental illness or impairment they should:
 - a. Take time to evaluate the situation.
 - b. Not abuse or threaten the person.
 - c. Avoid unnecessary excitement.
 - d. Not become overly excited or emotional.
2. Covington Police Department officers will follow the process below when accessing available community health resources:
 - a. The only mental health treatment facility that Covington P.D. officers will access is Piedmont Newton Hospital.

- b. Admission to Piedmont Newton Hospital can only be granted after a screening process is performed at the Piedmont Newton Hospital Emergency Room.
3. Officers should always be prepared to respond to sudden violent outbursts by persons with mental illnesses. The types of impaired behavior that are most dangerous are from persons who exhibit violence, are depressed/suicidal or where physical illness or loss of memory is involved.
4. Impaired behaviors seen most often by law enforcement officers are:
 - a. The psychopathic personality.
 - b. The alcoholic.
 - c. The drug addict.
 - d. The sex offender.
 - e. The mentally retarded.
 - f. The mental disorders associated with old age.
5. During field and in-custody interviews, officers should watch for persons displaying symptoms of mental illness.

VI. Tactical Procedures for Handling Mentally Ill Persons

- A. The use of force should always be a last resort when handling a disturbed person. Law enforcement officers need to carefully plan their actions before using any physical restraints. Be sure to call for assistance from fellow officers to ensure your own safety during the encounter. Reassure the person that you will not hurt him, but that you are there to get medical attention to him.
- B. The guiding principle for the officer using direct physical action is to have enough manpower available to quickly subdue and overwhelm the individual. Most mentally disturbed persons will cease to struggle as soon as they believe it is hopeless to continue. By using overwhelming force, you reduce the probability of either the subject or the officers being injured.
- C. Before acting, you should make the environment as safe as possible and decide among yourselves who will do what. Communicate! Once you begin acting, you should complete your move as quickly and efficiently as possible, using reasonable force. When the person has been brought under control, don't ignore him. Continue to talk to him, to reassure him that you do not want to harm him and that you still understand that he is having problems. This will help to reduce his anxiety, as well as his desire to strike out when the cuffs are removed at the hospital.
- D. Finally, when using restraints it is important to not only know how to use them, but when to use them. Restraints are used for two purposes:
 1. To control an individual who is being physically aggressive, and;

2. To remove a resistive person from his environment.
- E. When restraining a mentally ill person, you should use the least force necessary to control the individual. Police personnel shall use only that degree of force, which is reasonable and necessary to perform lawful objectives as outlined in SOP P040, Police Response to Aggression/Resistance.
 - F. A Police Response to Aggression/Resistance report will be required whenever the officer applies weaponless physical force by the use of the hands, less-than-lethal weapons, or use of control techniques or other level of force to overcome resistance to the extent it is likely to lead to injury, claim of injury, or allegation of excessive force, as outlined by SOP P040, Police Response to Aggression/Resistance.
 - G. After gaining control of a mentally ill person, the officer then must decide:
 1. If the person requires medical attention;
 2. If the person is to be charged with a crime;
 3. If the person requires psychological/mental health attention;
 4. In cases where an officer comes into contact with a mentally ill person, a written report shall be completed if:
 - a. The person has any injuries, even if prior to the officer's arrival;
 - b. If criminal warrants will be taken against the subject;
 - c. If any force is used against the subject.
 5. The report should contain:
 - a. The initial reason for the contact;
 - b. Any indicators exhibited by the person or other information that lead the officer to believe the person was mentally ill;
 - c. Any restraint or force used to subdue the person to include justification for the level of restraint or force;
 - d. Justification for transporting the person to a healthcare facility for psychological, mental, and/or other medical treatment;
 - e. The final disposition of the person at the healthcare facility.

VII. Procedures for Transporting Mental Patients

- A. Any requests from a local judge that the Covington Police transport a mental patient will be immediately honored. A judge's order is valid and recognized by all Covington Police officers.
- B. The Newton County Sheriff's Office is responsible for transportation of mentally ill patients from Piedmont Newton Hospital to other treatment locations, if they are not transported by ambulance.

- C. Officers will not transport mentally ill patients from community based mental health residences operated under the authority of the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD).
- D. In the event a request is received from a community mental health center, hospital, private citizen or a physician's office requesting transportation of a mentally disturbed patient, the Covington-Newton County 911 Center will determine if there is a clear and present danger to human life. If there is imminent life threatening behavior directed towards a person by the patient, the 911 Center dispatcher will dispatch 2 officers to the location.
 - 1. The caller should be made aware that the primary purpose of the officer's presence is to protect life and maintain order.
 - 2. If transportation of the patient is necessary, the officer will request an ambulance.
 - a. Officers will not ride in an ambulance with a person who is considered mentally ill unless the person is extremely violent.
 - b. Officers will accompany an ambulance to Piedmont Newton Hospital if the person has committed a crime for which they may be arrested in accordance with the laws of arrest for the State of Georgia or if the person is violent. A Covington Police officer will remain with the person until the screening process is completed or the security staff of the hospital agrees to take control of the person until transportation to another facility can be arranged.
 - c. Officers will only guard patients who are involved in CPD cases. Officers will not guard an individual who goes to Piedmont Newton Hospital on his/her own accord, brought by family members or other means. The responsibility to guard patients waiting to be committed rests with the Newton County Sheriff's Office.
 - d. In instances where a patient is violent or disruptive, officers will respond to insure the safety of hospital personnel.
 - e. If a mentally ill patient is transported in a CPD vehicle, the person will be handcuffed per standard operating procedures.
 - 3. The 911 Center, upon notification by hospital personnel that an involuntary patient pursuant to a valid physician's certificate and court order has escaped, will take the necessary information to broadcast a lookout on the person. If the person is located, they will be returned to the hospital by the officer.

VIII. Training

- A. Entry level training shall be accomplished with all new police officer recruits in the basic mandate police academy as outlined in the Georgia Peace Officers Reference Text, Section 3, Community Relations, Subsection 3.3, Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse.

- B. Refresher/In-Service training shall be provided to all sworn personnel at least every three years regarding dealing with mentally ill persons and available referral services.

This SOP supersedes any SOP previously issued.

BY ORDER OF THE CHIEF OF POLICE:

Stacey L. Cotton

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Chief of Police