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**POSTER ABSTRACT****Sounding the Alarm: Firefighter Behavioral Health and Suicide Prevention**

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Diane Scott<sup>1</sup>, Billie Ratiliff, Cara English1: United States

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***Introduction***

The relationship between occupational exposure to traumatic situations and an increase in mental health concerns for firefighters/EMS/paramedics has only recently begun to be studied. The average suicidal ideation rate of North American first responders is 47% with almost two times the number of completed suicides compared with the general population. Following the suicide of a peer support fire fighter in 2019, the Rio Rancho Fire Department located in the southwestern state of New Mexico, US, partnered with Cummings Graduate Institute (CGI) to design an integrated curriculum for firefighters regarding their own mental health.

***Aims Objectives Theory or Methods***

This project aims to meet the need for increased knowledge concerning suicide, developmental and event trauma, and self-care and resiliency among firefighters/EMS/paramedics. The curriculum will include training to recognize symptoms of trauma, reduce stigma in first responder culture related to identification of mental health symptoms, increase help-seeking behaviors in the population, and improve first responders' levels of competence and confidence when responding to mental health emergencies in the community. The curriculum will be delivered in a hybrid online/in-person model. Outcomes related to knowledge gains, stigma reduction, and help-seeking behavior will be measured.

***Highlights or Results or Key Findings***

Rio Rancho Fire Department Chief identified the need for this training and consulted with CGI to design this curriculum to ensure acceptability among firefighters/EMS/paramedics. Four levels of certification, used in all department professional development, were mirrored in this curriculum, building in rigor of information and skills at each level. Each certification level includes modules regarding Suicidology, Trauma, and Self-Care/Resiliency. A pre- and post-survey will capture first responders' understanding of suicide, trauma, and self-care and resiliency, and a training evaluation will capture perceptions of value and areas in need of improvement or further training. This professionally-normed curriculum design strategy encourages firefighters/EMS/paramedics to move from awareness of the harmful impacts of workplace-induced trauma to an action-orientation in which mental health becomes as important as physical health. An evaluative survey

will provide qualitative measurement of the value of the course material and will provide feedback to curriculum designers for quality improvement.

### ***Conclusions***

This project is taking a unique approach in filling a gap in training and education for first responders in the neuroscience behind trauma, suicidology, and mental health. By closing the gap and reducing stigma around mental health in the population, our aim is to prevent future first responder suicides.

### ***Implications for applicability/transferability sustainability and limitations***

This training is primarily online, and as videoconferences are now commonplace due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our curriculum is easily transferable, sustainable, and applicable to other fire departments. We believe there is great potential for this program to be expanded to include additional first responder professions.