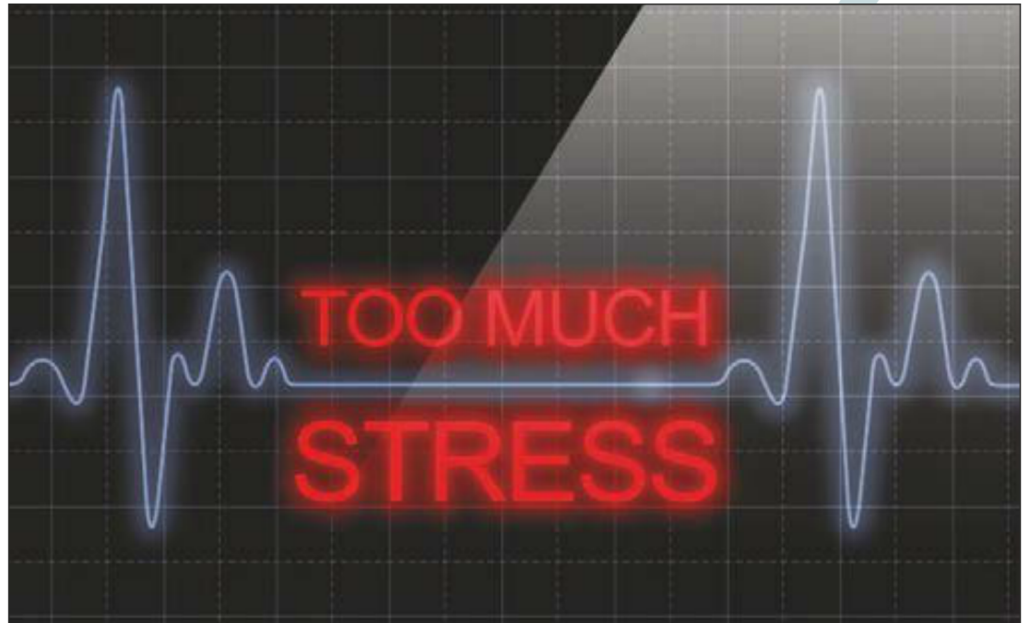


Protecting Security Professionals from Post-Traumatic Stress

The trauma of witnessing a distressing event, or suffering an injury during the course of an incident at work, is a threat facing professionals in the security community. Alas, many across the security business sector still don't know enough about the consequences of these events for mental health and the onset of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Crawford Chalmers and Patrick Rea offer their thoughts on this vitally important issue



Crawford Chalmers: Executive Committee Charity Liaison for ASIS International's UK Chapter

Exactly what is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)? How might security professionals be affected by it and, most important of all, to whom can they turn for help should it visit them at some point?

The lack of knowledge around PTSD often applies as much to Human Resources (HR) staff working in our organisations as it does to line managers. Unrecognised, the symptoms of PTSD can persist and result in job loss, family breakdown or even worse. At best, it can lead to poor performance in the workplace in tandem with a generally low quality of life.

It's for these important reasons that ASIS UK has taken steps towards addressing the issue by partnering with charity PTSD Resolution to access its national network of therapists for the treatment of trauma suffered by members.

Indeed, ASIS is the first security membership organisation probably in the world to offer trauma treatment as a member service through a preferred supplier. This means that any member of ASIS UK who feels that they might be suffering from trauma, however it may have been caused, can access the PTSD Resolution network of some 200 therapists at a preferential fee rate.

A major benefit is that an appointment for therapy can usually be arranged in just a matter

of days. Also, the service is confidential and no referral is needed from a GP.

ASIS UK has worked with PTSD Resolution for several years now in support of its primary aim, which is to provide help to UK Armed Forces' veterans and reservists who may be experiencing the residual effects of military trauma. The charity has helped many veterans – some of whom work in the security business sector – as part of a service that's both compassionate and hugely effective.

Ever-present risk

There are particular issues of mental health associated with the security sector's community, not only because of the number of veterans resident within its ranks, but also because of what members of staff may see or hear or otherwise experience during the course of their work. Given the current level of terrorist threat, there's an ever-present risk of being exposed to trauma, either at first hand or through the accounts of colleagues.

All responsible organisations of any size now have contingency plans in place to deal with a terrorist attack or other security threat or damage. It's universally recognised as a sensible and logical precaution, but too few organisations have any kind of back-up plan

worked out in terms of how to deal with the trauma that staff might experience from any of these or other circumstances encountered during the course of their employment.

According to the UK Statistics Authority, there were 17 million workdays lost nationally to stress, depression and anxiety in 2015 alone. The cost of this to the UK's economy is estimated at £2.4 billion. This figure shows an increase in the number of lost workdays from the previous year. In 2014, the equivalent statistic was 13.6 million workdays.

Duty of Care

Employers have particular responsibilities towards those with PTSD or other mental health disorders. In the workplace, there's a legal Duty of Care to protect the health of employees. This is enshrined in the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and reinforced by the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (which state that employers must assess the risk of stress-related injury).

Failure to comply with these regulations can make the employer liable to pay damages. Also, under the Equality Act 2010, it's illegal for an employer to discriminate on the grounds of an existing mental health condition.

In addition to any legal obligations, as responsible people working in the risk and security sector it's fair to say employers should acknowledge that trauma and stress can be a problem. They should be able to recognise the symptoms in themselves or in their members of staff, and then know how to take action and what to do – in much the same way that when we recognise we have toothache, we don't hesitate to visit the dentist.

The relationship with PTSD Resolution means that there's now a clear pathway to treatment for ASIS UK's members. In addition, the charity can arrange half-day Workshops for members working in HR or as line managers such that they can recognise the symptoms of trauma and 'signpost' help.

The charity emphasises that the goal of these courses is not to turn security people into psychotherapists, but rather enable them to be aware of what to look out for if a member of staff, or indeed they themselves, is exposed to a potentially traumatic incident (whether it's at work or at any other time). Contact the charity direct at www.ptsdresolution.org if you wish to organise a Workshop, which should be for a minimum of ten participants.

We firmly believe that support for trauma – in other words ready access to a local network of therapists skilled in dealing with PTSD symptoms – will become, and should be, the

normal provision for professionals working in this business sector.

Basics of therapy

Many environmental stimuli will cause alarm and distress in a traumatised person and, as time goes by, the patterns can generalise, making less and less of the world tolerable. This is precisely why we see people who have been living in tents, or even underground, in an attempt to escape from the noise and random threats of the world.

PTSD Resolution offers treatment straight away, as close as possible to where sufferers live, and generally in domestic rather than institutional premises. The whole aim is to keep the therapeutic meetings as calm as possible such that the process of teaching the traumatised brain to calm down and see that everyday noises are not threats can be achieved as quickly as possible.

Almost all approaches towards trauma will involve some degree of re-exposure to the traumatic events themselves, as the ultimate aim is to teach the brain that those events can be considered without any alarm bells ringing.

Some methods here are considered violent, like the virtual reality system using simulators that seems to be gaining ground in the US.

Generally, people are asked to recount the events they suffered, often many times and over many meetings. For the most part this appears to work, though again it seems to be a burden most veterans might prefer to avoid.

PTSD Resolution uses a different approach as the first choice with its clients. Therapists first teach individuals to become very calm both mentally and physically. This is a vital life skill in itself, and one that's even more useful to traumatised people. Therapists then ask clients to construct a mental 'film' of the event(s) and view them, in a state of great calm, on an imaginary television screen which, in the first place, they don't even have to look at.

Over multiple iterations, they become able to view the events more directly, until in the end they can watch their traumatic events without a significant emotional upset occurring.

Together with re-appraising the history and consequences of the trauma and building effective and efficient strategies for re-entering normal life and coping with its difficulties, this realises good results for most.



Patrick Rea: Director and Trustee of PTSD Resolution



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