

Sheriff offers transition program for returnin vets

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The Johnson County Sheriff's Department is making the transition for veterans returning to the civilian work force easier with its new Post Incident Assistance Program.

Daniel Claiborn of Forensic Psychologist Associates has been working with departments within the county for 25 years including the Highway Patrol, Kansas B of Investigation and several police departments. He said most departments offer counseling for employees coming off of a traumatic experience, military or otherwise. Many departments have employees returning from active duty, he said, so a program to help ease the transition makes sense.

"Almost everyone has some symptoms — difficulty driving, loud noises, also dealing with being in large crowds and sleep difficulties," Claiborn said.

Claiborn works with returning veterans in a session that usually lasts an hour. They talk about troubles they may be having, and he lets them know about things look out for.

The program isn't limited to those who have served in the military. Sheriff's deputies who handle a violent car wreck or another potentially troubling case may g through the program as a way to avoid trauma. It's also open to spouses to help them readjust.

Claiborn said it was important for law enforcement officers to undergo a therapy session when they re-enter a world that potentially can have a lot of daily stres

Claiborn said that the department recognized the program as a benefit, and that the deputies understood that as well. He stresses that the program is not a punishment or a sign of mental illness.

"It's the body's way of processing trauma," Claiborn said of after effects.

"It takes the nervous system several weeks to unwind. We try to make them be patient."

Perhaps most important to deputies who are assigned to the program is privacy. The doctor said he doesn't take notes during the sessions. Unless Claiborn de a deputy unable to re-enter the work force, the department will get no feedback from the meeting other than that the deputy attended.

Sgt. Erin O'Donnell said she expected that confidentiality to make the session easier for deputies to accept.

She said it would be beneficial that the program wasn't limited to military personnel.

"It will make it easier to go and not seem like we're singling out veterans," O'Donnell said. "We never for a second wanted to make them feel that we thought th were not fit for duty."

The only deputy to go through the program as a returning serviceman so far has been Deputy Tyron Hudgins. He recently returned from two yearlong deploym to Iraq. He spent the hour with the doctor and said the program was helpful in ways he hadn't expected.

"I never thought I needed it, but it was nice to be able to talk to him," Hudgins said. "The really good thing was that he had a lot of answers for questions I had."

Hudgins also will go through a three-month followup session to assess how he has adjusted to his return to the work force. He said he would embrace the mee

"The adjustment's been nice," Hudgins said.

"It's a relief to be back in the states, and the sheriff has made the transition easy."