

ISU physical therapists and law enforcement cadets join forces for health and wellness

CTAP results in fewer law enforcement officer injuries and a reduction in sick days

POCATELLO - Students in Idaho State University's Physical Therapy (PT) program are accomplishing much more than just post-injury therapy. With a focus on preventive care, the program also runs the Center for Tactile Athletic Performance, involved with ISU's law enforcement officer training. CTAP is an interdisciplinary effort, created with the purpose of providing health and wellness education, injury prevention, and fitness training for law enforcement cadets at the ISU Idaho Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) Academy. The program is introduced as a foundational course for cadets, in order to ensure their continued health, safety and wellness throughout the duration of their law enforcement career.

While the POST Academy curriculum includes an overview of health and wellness education, students and faculty involved in CTAP step in and elaborate further in order to provide clarifications and interactive experiences for cadets on the subject matter. The need for such a program was brought to the PT department's attention in 2016 by student Bailey Vail, who is now an ISU Doctor of Physical Therapy graduate, whose husband is a Pocatello officer. After learning that police officers on average die many years younger than the average population, Vail worked with ISU faculty to create CTAP. According to a 2013 article in the International Journal of Emergency Mental Health and Human Resilience, factors like the dangerous nature of their job, poor diets, erratic sleep patterns and high stress all amount to a 22 year shorter average lifespan for police officers.

To tackle the health issues and early mortality of this population, PT students collaborate to design workouts specific to the job demands of law enforcement officers (LEOs), and hope to instill skills to encourage lifelong fitness. Students of the PT program also assist cadets with injuries occurring during their times at the academy, providing evaluations, treatments, and exercise modifications for injured cadets. Additionally, PT faculty and students provide education to cadets about injuries and pathologies commonly seen in the LEO population. Deanna Dye, PT, PhD, PT program director and associate professor, says, "Cadets also have the opportunity to see these pathologies within the body in the cadaver lab at ISU. This enables them to gain new appreciation and understanding of these pathologies, and why prevention of these ailments is so important."

Vail says another critical element of the CTAP program is nutrition education. A dietician provides information to educate cadets about healthy eating, specifically aligned with the lifestyle and physical demands for LEOs. Mallory Summers and Jenifer Reader, both ISU alumni, serve as CTAP dieticians. Both understand the needs and challenges when it comes to healthy eating for LEOs and want to share that knowledge. Thanks to their expertise, some of the POST cadets have lost substantial amounts of weight at the start of their careers.

Dye says CTAP is also working on ways to incorporate psychology, in order to provide information on suicide prevention as well stress management techniques as well. The Center of New Directions, counseling services center for the College of Technology, was able to lecture the cadets on suicide prevention and stress management. Organizers say this will provide a more comprehensive 'whole body approach' to support the cadet's health and wellness throughout their careers.

The wellbeing of Pocatello's law enforcement has become a priority, and Vail believes that "the overall health and wellness of our law enforcement officers will allow for a safer

community. These officers will not need as many sick days due to more rapid recovery from injuries and illnesses which helps keep all shifts and departments fully staffed. It ensures that every dollar we invest, as a community, in these officers and their training will be a sound investment because they are provided the tools, resources, and training they need to maintain a long and healthy career. They are more prepared to perform better physically and mentally when the stressors and challenges of the job present themselves,” she says.

On May 3, 16 ISU CTAP officers will graduate and join the law enforcement workplace. Vail says this year’s graduates, and all of the officers that graduate from CTAP, are better informed with knowledge to combat challenges that law enforcement officers face every day.

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Written by: Lee Ann Hancock, Director of Divisional Marketing and Communications and McKenzie Dalley, College of Pharmacy Career Path Intern

Contact: Lee Ann Hancock, Director of Divisional Marketing and Communications, 208-305-6811 or hanclee@isu.edu; Bailey Vail, PT, DPT, Adjunct Faculty/Director, Center for Tactical Athletic Performance, 760-271-1886 or livekait@isu.edu; Deanna Dye, PT, PhD, ISU Physical Therapy Program Director/Associate Professor, 208-282-5166 or dyedean@isu.edu