

Questions and comments from the event

Cliff Overton: Andrew - as a highly visible leader in the sector I wonder how you manage the duality of your own personal vulnerability and the constant expectations on you as a leader to lead.

Andrew Crisp: Good question Cliff. it's not easy at times and I think just being honest about how I feel helps. I also have an amazing supportive family and close friends I can talk to.

Sue Sheldrick: It is reassuring that our EM Commissioner understands the point at which asking "RUOK" opens the important realisation that we can all get to the point we've had enough and need help. Thanks Andrew.

Andrew Crisp: I agree Sue. When I ask someone if they're okay I will often follow up and say, are you really okay and it's surprising the number of people that then open up

Cliff Overton: I recently accessed a wellbeing coach through the Phoenix "SOLAR" program, we worked on rumination together. Well worth doing and I highly recommend the program. It is aimed at rural and regional, but I hope it goes further.

Pam Cooper: Thanks Andrew. During your time at Vic Pol, I have always found you to be such a compelling speaker. Very refreshing listening to you what you had to say tonight.

Andrew Crisp: That's very nice of you Pam and good to hear from you. I just want to make a difference and especially when it comes to the welfare of our colleagues across the sector. I guess as I've been around a long time, I have collected some stories and experience to share but everyone has experiences they can share to help others

John Durkin: If psychologists and psychiatrists are helpful, how come suicide rates remain high and unchanged in emergency services for years.

Jennifer Wild to Everyone: Hi John, suicide rates are high as are thoughts of suicide. Our research shows that line manager training which improves the skills of line managers to identify mental health problems (depression in the case of suicide) is helpful in terms of intervening when workers are at their lowest. Obviously, we don't want people to get to this point - and line manager training may help to identify emergency workers who are struggling before things spiral. Some resilience training helps emergency workers to identify triggers for low mood and to respond to triggers - again before things spiral.

Andrew Crisp: I agree Jennifer and it's so important that we use all our tools including the training of line managers. I'm also a strong supporter of peer support and chaplaincy programs and I mean chaplaincy in its broadest term.

Patricia Blanks: My family members in Vic Pol and Defence taught me a lot as a Chaplain.

Andrew Crisp: Victoria Police members are so fortunate to be supported by such a strong multi-faith chaplaincy program. What I found though it wasn't really about the faith, it was good caring people that knew how to ask the right questions and listen.

John Durkin: Jennifer, thanks for your reply. Surely, we should not be speculating when psychologists and psychiatrists have been working with emergency services for years. I train

firefighters to prevent suicide in colleagues, but it will never find its way into a journal. Relief, gratitude, and posttraumatic growth do not lend themselves to the so-called gold standard of research. The literature is devoid of success in preventing suicide in this high-risk group.

John Durkin: I led the crisis response for the Met Police in London after the 2017 terrorist attacks using a team of firefighters. 80+ officers worst affected returned to duty with no PTSD three years later. Not a psychiatrist in sight.

Andrew Crisp to Everyone: Thanks for that comment, John. I would be interested in learning more about what was done.

Tony Pearce: Hi Monique, your point about sleep is highly relevant and there is much evidence to relate that to poor mental health outcomes in our sector. I have suffered a significant sleep disorder since the Thredbo Landslip disaster in 1997 that has at times had a significant impact on my function. I have been fortunate to recently participate in a new randomised sleep trial being conducted by Phoenix Australia which has whilst not fully resolving the issue had a positive impact on my circumstances.

Monique Crane: Hi Tony, you are correct to think that sleep has a major effect. Finding a helpful resolution to sleep issues pre-deployment is really something that we are looking to work on as well as helping people recover after a workday to allow better sleep.

Cliff Overton: Hi Monique - the similarities between defence and emergency management are many, but we might need to explore the differences too, so we better understand them. Case in point - I received treatment for PTSD from a practitioner who treated armed services personnel returning from deployment. Unfortunately, we could not establish an agreed context and the treatment left me worse than when I started, triggered by assumptions made by the practitioner. Understanding difference is important.

Greg Snart: Hi Andrew, based on your time with VicPol, and your experiences there, do think there is a difference between the way Mental Health is dealt with between paid emergency service personnel and volunteers.?

Andrew Crisp: Thanks Greg. With the leaders of our volunteer emergency services I see such a strong commitment to mental health I think what we need to do more is to listen to our volunteers about how better we can support their health and well being

Greg Snart: Thanks Andrew, I was more thinking about whether paid staff are being "compelled" to undertake Mental Health training....and whether you think this is something that should be mandatory for Volunteers, during Minimum Skills training and as part of leadership training courses.??

Andrew Crisp: That's something I will look into Greg with what programs are offered. There are better qualified on the panel to talk about what should or could be mandatory mental health training

Greg Snart: Thanks Andrew, we did discuss this at the forum at VEMI in Mt Macedon and I was wondering if it had made its way to the upper management levels of CFA....it is reassuring to hear your thoughts and endorsement of this type of training.

Cliff Overton: Greg - yes, volunteer minimum skills should include mental health and resilience. Crew leader training should take it to the next level. ESF are researching these opportunities.

Cliff Overton to Everyone: Hi Greg - our discussion at Mt Macedon was presented to the heads of agencies recently, thanks to ESF. They are listening and paying attention to our ideas.

Sue Sheldrick: Monique's point about leadership is very significant. In the current ESO world, leadership training has become obvious in its absence. Such an important reassurance for the people that work in your team, having confidence in their leader, psychological confidence, is so important when challenges and unknowns arise on the incident ground and in an ICC.

Andrew Crisp: You're right Sue - there is more we should be doing on leadership training!

Monique Crane: The leadership training is showing real potential in the ADF context, and we are about to start a new trial in teaching staff at a school. Again, the process and intent are very adaptable to most occupational contexts.

Cliff Overton: The opportunities to use mindfulness in training are significant. Rather than adopt the classic cultural model of "stress testing" our people in mock emergencies as we train them, we can also build in mindfulness and create the space for people to centre themselves, stop and think and then take thoughtful action.

Dennis Smith: There is a fair amount of research coming out of the U.S. & Canada regarding mindfulness benefits including data from first responder agencies.

Various: What is the name of the App you discussed Denise? (unfortunately due to Denise's technical issues we did not get to finish the conversation with her where she would have elaborated more on the trial)

The name of the app is Build Back Better.

Neville Goddard: Denise, the app asks for a validation code that was provided during the research onboarding.... does that mean we don't have access to the app if we weren't part of the research behind it?

Denise Meuldijk: Due to Ethical considerations, we unfortunately can't enrol individuals at this stage! There is a possibility that we will start a bigger research trial after October – so then individuals can definitely participate, happy to keep ESF informed about this.

Helen Righton to Everyone: See: <https://content.api.worksafe.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-06/ISBN-Preventing-work-related-stress-examples-of-risk-control-measures-2017-05.pdf>