What Skills Do First Responders Need to Communicate Effectively with People with Communication Disorders? A Proposal for Communication Partner Training

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Introduction

- Individuals with speech, language, and cognitive-communication impairments may be at a higher risk of facing adverse events during an emergency as communication breakdowns are likely to occur given the increased stress the event holds and the increased demand to communicate effectively and quickly.
- Though 90% of an officer’s day is spent in some form of communication, there is limited research on preventing and navigating communication breakdowns with citizens who have communication disorders.
- One communication training offered to police officers during their academy experience included public speaking, voice, and articulation, and small group communication and was presented by a fellow officer.
- Other trainings focus on de-escalation techniques specific to mental health disorders.
- Tougher et al. (2004) investigated the effectiveness of a training program to improve police officers’ responsiveness to people with a traumatic brain injury by means of improved communication strategies.

Methods

- Literature inclusion criteria: Training program for effective communication with specialized populations, written in English, peer reviewed.
- Led to 8 articles for review.
- Contacted Wilmington Police Dept and New Castle County Police Dept to gain relevant knowledge regarding current communication training practices offered to incoming recruits.
- Conducted preliminary scheduling to present proposed training to senior and rookie officers.

Results

- The information from the literature review was then used to develop a communication training program, though was unable to be delivered; excerpts from the slides are presented here.

Future Directions

- To date, there is limited research that documents the effectiveness a communication partner training will have for first responders.
- Future research may wish to consider the following areas:
  - Effectiveness of such training supported by pre- and post-measures
  - Inclusion of seasoned and novice first responders
  - Follow up for maintenance of knowledge gained and frequency of use

State and federal budgets, accessibility, and time constraints

References


*Note: A training of New Jersey emergency service first responders is in its initial stages to build training initiatives for communication partners to effectively communicate with people who have communication disorders.

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Figure 1: Successful Training Program Components

- Role playing, modeling, facilitator coaching
- Good and poor communication strategies
- Managing communication breakdowns
- Collecting pre- and post-measures

Figure 2: Excerpts from Proposed Training

- Communication Disorders
  - “An impairment in the ability to send, receive, process, and comprehend concepts or words, nonverbal and graphic symbolic systems”
- “Other communication behaviors associated with impaired verbal language”

- “Good” Communication Tips
  - Use appropriate language
  - “I don’t understand” (don’t loud out)
  - “I need to know” (ask questions 1-2 at a time)
  - “I don’t hear” (use gestures or ask questions)
  - “I can’t tell” (there is no dominant non-verbal communication)
  - Cultures, written or oral
  - Ask for clarification if you do not understand

- Communication Partner Training

Research Question

What do first responders need to communicate effectively with people with communication disorders?