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SARATOGA COUNTY ANNOUNCES MULTI-AGENCY SUPPORT TEAM TO RESPOND TO FIRST RESPONDERS

The Saratoga County Peer Support Team Provides Individual Support, Critical Incident Stress Debriefing, Referral, and Consultation Services for First Responders in the County

Ballston Spa, NY – Saratoga County officials today announced the creation of the Saratoga County Peer Support Team (SCPST), a unique multi-agency peer support team that provides mental health and post-traumatic incident response to first responders in need. The SCPST is a collaboration between Saratoga County Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and the Saratoga County EMS Council. The team’s mission is to *respond to Responders*.

The trained team of 50 members across multiple agencies and responder disciplines, including EMS, fire, and law enforcement, stands ready to aid individual First Responders in distress or groups in the aftermath of traumatic incidents.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), among others, report significantly elevated levels of anxiety, depression, PTSD, suicidal ideation and attempts, addiction, and divorce among First Responders.

Locally, within the past six weeks, during the team’s pilot, members conducted critical incident debriefings at five agencies and provided individual support and follow up to more than 20 individuals who responded to calls involving fatalities and First Responder suicide.

Saratoga County Board of Supervisors Chairman, Theodore T. Kusnierz, Jr. said, “We are very pleased to announce this peer support service that gives back to our first responders who give selflessly every day to help Saratoga County residents and others. This combined team of EMS, fire, law enforcement and mental health professionals will use their unique skills to assist their peers in need which will further bolster the resilience of our first responders.”

Dr. Michael Prezioso, Commissioner of Saratoga County Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, and Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at Albany Medical College leads the SCPST startup.

(more)

Dr. Prezioso said, "This unique collaboration between the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and the Saratoga County EMS Council offers unparalleled support to the County's First Responders, who place themselves at risk each day in service to our community."

Team members provide confidential peer support, assessment, and referral for ongoing care and treatment. The Team has a level of mental health expertise and involvement that makes this program unique and that maximizes training, problem-solving, and consultation including clinical input and education regarding behavioral healthcare systems.

In addition to peer support, the SCPST offers consultation to agencies regarding mental health and addiction, case consultation in circumstances involving repeated contact with mentally ill persons in the community and education regarding topics in mental health and addiction.

The Team is centrally coordinated and makes use of an existing communication platform. *I Am Responding*, used by first responders to ensure rapid notification and response in case of need. First responders may self-refer or be referred by agency leaders.

Additional information is available through the Saratoga County EMS Council website at www.saratogaems.org.

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