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Post-Academy Fitness Programs Part II

Introduction

This bulletin is the second of a two part series addressing the current trends and activities regarding post-academy physical fitness programming among Texas law enforcement agencies. In Part I, October 1997, the nature and level of participation involved in a fitness program were examined, as well as the availability of on-site fitness equipment and facilities and on-site lifestyle change programs. This month's bulletin will characterize the type of leadership responsible for post-recruit training programs among Texas law enforcement agencies and explore the nature of fitness standards currently in place among sampled law enforcement agencies. Additionally, whether agencies had implemented a truly mandatory post-academy physical fitness program and reasons for non-implementation will be examined.

Research continues to support the importance of a proper diet and physical exercise to alleviate many of the health consequences associated with a sedentary lifestyle. Shephard (1995) has suggested that regular physical activity helps prevent coronary heart disease, hypertension, osteoporosis, depression, and anxiety. Regular physical activity has been associated with other benefits including weight control, increased mental alertness, increased aerobic capacity, improved muscle strength and endurance, improved flexibility, improved self-concept, and improved overall quality of life (Getchell 1992; Hockey 1993; Hoffman 1993; International Association of Chiefs of Police 1979b; Klug and Lettunich 1992).

According to Blair (1995), "there is ample evidence equating physical activity with good health; it is evident that we need new tools and new strategies to reach the millions of individuals who remain physically inactive" (p. 350). Organizations such as the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Heart Association are publicizing official recommendations regarding physical activity and health promotion. Many American businesses are initiating worksite wellness programs to ensure that employees have the opportunity to change unhealthy lifestyle habits. Many organizations offer a variety of activities including weight control, physical fitness, stress management, smoking control, to name a few. The two most popular programs within workplace health promotion are injury prevention and physical fitness ("What is Worksite ..." 1997). Despite the interest in police physical fitness programming, support has been less than optimal. Few departments mandate fitness training beyond the initial academy requirements (Arters and Aaron 1989; Ness and Light 1992; Nichols 1994). The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE) provides minimum fitness training requirements for academy trainees; however, these standards do not extend beyond initial, preservice training. In other words, Texas law enforcement agencies must rely upon internal departmental policies for programs such as post-academy physical fitness training.

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As discussed in the Part I, October 1997 issue of *TELEMASP*, a survey instrument consisting of four sections was distributed to select Texas law enforcement agencies to identify characteristics of law enforcement physical fitness programs for incumbent personnel. The sample was composed of 63 randomly selected municipal police and sheriffs' departments. While Part I covered sections one and two, this month's bulletin will focus on sections three and four.

Fitness Program Leadership

Fitness trainers are an essential element to any type of physical fitness program (Charles 1983; Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research 1996; Collingwood 1988b, 1996; McNeill and Prentice 1984; Rizenman 1988). Specifically, Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research (1996) reports that "leadership accounts for approximately 50% of the success variance of a physical fitness program" (p. B5). This bulletin found that 19 of

the 23 departments with on-going fitness training employ a fitness leader (see Table 1). Of the 19 agencies with fitness instructors, 17 are sworn personnel. Agencies were also asked to identify the amount of supervision offered by these 19 fitness instructors. Only two agencies provide one-on-one supervision.

The 19 agencies that reported the presence of a fitness leader were asked to identify the motivational techniques employed by their trainer(s). These respondents selected from a list of five options those strategies utilized to increase fitness program participation. As shown in Table 2, 16 (69.6%) utilized some form of motivation. Nine agencies (39.1%) employed goal-setting strategies, and nine agencies also utilized the buddy system. The third most common motivational approach was the use of improvement charts, reported by seven agencies (30.4%). Seven agencies also provided encouragement simply by recognizing an officer's involvement in the fitness program. Interestingly, all

Table 1

Summary of Fitness Leader Characteristics

Variable	f	Mandatory n=3	Voluntary n=20	% with Program	% of Sample
Presence of Fitness Leader	19	3	16	82.6	30.2
Sworn Officer	17	2	15	73.9	27.0
Non-sworn Officer	2	1	1	8.7	3.2
Certified Instructor	9	3	6	39.1	14.3

Table 2

Summary of Fitness Leader Encouragement by Program Type

Form of Encouragement	f	Mandatory n=3	Voluntary n=20	% with Program
Presence of Motivational Technique	16	3	13	69.6
Use of Buddy System	9	2	7	39.1
Goal-setting/Individualized program	9	3	6	39.1
Use of Improvement Charts	7	3	4	30.4
Recognition of Program Involvement	7	3	4	30.4

three mandatory programs indicated that their agency offered goal-setting strategies and utilized improvement charts.

Legal Aspects of Implementation

The survey examined certain variables which may determine whether participating agencies could implement a legally defensible mandatory post-academy physical fitness program. For example, the survey items examined whether: (a) an agency performed a job task analysis; (b) an agency's job description included phrases which linked physical fitness to essential police tasks; (c) whether all sworn personnel were subjected to routine fitness testing; and (d) whether all sworn personnel, regardless of rank, current duty assignment or age were required to participate in departmental fitness training. Only three agencies (4.8%) had successfully implemented all necessary requirements inherent in mandatory fitness training. This may be because law enforcement agencies may not be aware of either the legal requisites of mandatory fitness training or the processes involved in developing formal departmental guidelines.

The second policy area which may create ambiguity for law enforcement administrators is the successful implementation of specified formal directives. Many officials may not know how to achieve policy guidelines requisite of mandatory post-academy physical fitness programming. For example, some may not recognize the inherent confusion with physical fitness validation strategies. The apparent ambiguity may be one reason why fitness testing and physical fitness standards appear less frequently in this study.

Physical Fitness Assessments

Only 17 departments indicated they routinely perform physical fitness assessments. Table 3 reveals that the single most common fitness assessment was the sit-and-reach test utilized to measure officers' flexibility. Nine departments (14.3%) reported that they routinely required sworn personnel to perform a 1.5 mile run which assesses their aerobic power. Occurring equally as often was the assessment of dynamic muscular strength and body composition, as eight departments (12.7%) measured each of these fitness components. The least common physical fitness assessment was the measurement of absolute muscular strength, performed by only six agencies (9.5%).

Medical Clearance

When the participating departments were asked if they required sworn officers to obtain medical clearance prior to performing any physical fitness assessments, 15 agencies (23.8%) indicated that medical clearance must be acquired, and 42 (66.7%) indicated that medical clearance was not a prerequisite for fitness testing. Of these 42 agencies not requiring officers to be cleared by a medical doctor, eight departments indicated that they had a post-academy physical fitness program in place (see Table 4).

It is important to note that one of the mandatory fitness programs permitted its personnel to participate in fitness activities without being medically cleared by a physician. This respondent, however, reported that "some are required if they are suspect. Three officers

Table 3

Summary of Physical Fitness Testing Elements

Fitness Component	f	% of Sample	Mandatory n=3		Voluntary n=20		No Program n=40	
			f	%	f	%	f	%
Presence of Fitness-related Testing Elements	12	19.1	3	100.0	8	40.0	1	2.5
Flexibility	10	15.9	3	100.0	6	30.0	1	2.5
Aerobic Power	9	14.3	3	100.0	6	30.0	0	0.0
Dynamic Muscular Strength	8	12.7	3	100.0	5	25.0	0	0.0
Body Composition	8	12.7	3	100.0	5	25.0	0	0.0
Absolute Muscular Strength	6	9.5	2	66.7	3	15.0	1	2.5

Table 4

Summary of Medical Clearance by Program Type

Medical Clearance	% of Sample		Mandatory n=3		Voluntary n=20		No Program n=40	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
No	42	66.7	1	33.3	7	35.0	34	85.0
Yes	15	23.8	2	66.7	8	40.0	5	12.5
No Response	6	9.5	0	00.0	5	25.0	1	2.5
TOTAL	63	100.0	3	100.0	20	100.0	40	100.0

have been instructed to obtain a physical from a medical doctor before being allowed to participate." The remaining seven agencies (35%) which indicated that medical clearance was not required had a voluntary program in place.

Medical Screening

In addition to assessing an officer's physical fitness level, law enforcement agencies may also perform a variety of health screening elements. Thus, respondents were given a list of eight health screening options and were asked to select those assessments routinely performed on sworn personnel (see Table 5). Twenty-three respondents (36.5%) indicated that their depart-

ment routinely evaluated the health status of their sworn personnel, with the single most common type of health screening assessment being the complete medical exam (n=15). Determining an officer's resting blood pressure was the second most common medical screening component (n=11). Evaluation of an officer's body fat composition and routinely assessing an officer's height and weight was reported by 10 agencies, respectively. Closely following body fat and height and weight assessments was the completion of a family questionnaire (n=9) and the evaluation of an officer's resting heart rate (n=9). Seven agencies performed a urinalysis and five departments conducted a blood analysis (n=5). It should be noted, however, that these results may be incomplete since the types of assess-

Table 5

Summary of Medical Screening Assessments Performed

Variable	% of Sample		Mandatory n=3		Voluntary n=20		No Program n=40	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Presence of Medical Screening	23	36.5	3	100.0	10	50.0	10	25.0
Complete Medical Exam	15	23.8	1	33.3	6	30.0	8	20.0
Resting Blood Pressure	11	17.5	2	66.7	6	30.0	3	7.5
Body Composition	10	15.9	3	100.0	6	30.0	1	2.5
Height/Weight	10	15.9	2	66.7	6	30.0	2	5.0
Family History Questionnaire	9	14.3	3	100.0	5	25.0	1	2.5
Resting Heart Rate	9	14.3	2	66.7	6	30.0	1	2.5
Urinalysis	7	11.1	1	33.3	3	15.0	3	7.5
Blood Analysis	5	7.9	1	33.3	3	15.0	1	2.5

ments taken during a complete medical exam were not indicated.

Program Impediments

The last survey items were designed to elicit responses from those agencies without a post-recruit physical fitness program in place (n=40). Respondents were asked to identify the most significant impediment to program initiation. Lack of finances and the lack of concern or interest in a fitness program were the most frequently reported reasons followed by fear of litigation (see Table 6). Although the survey item's intent was to address the legality surrounding fair and consistent application of departmental fitness training, it is unclear as to what type of liability was reflected by the respondents, since some suggest that police organization litigation may include various negligence and adverse impact claims (Barrineau 1994; Collingwood 1995; McNickle 1996; Pilant 1995; Schofield 1989; Summers 1985).

Table 6

Aggregate Scores and Rank of Factors Reported as Program Impediments

Program Obstacle	Aggregate Score	Rank
Lack of Finances	21.0	1
Lack of Concern/Interest	32.2	2
Fear of Litigation	39.5	3
Lack of Administrative Support	50.2	4
Union Opposition	51.3	5
Other	60.8	6

Recommendations

As with any research effort, the goal is to offer an increased understanding to a designated field of study. In Part I, October 1997 and this month's bulletin, empirical evidence was provided summarizing trends and activities associated with post-academy police physical fitness training. The information was designed to increase awareness among police administra-

tors about requirements inherent in mandatory post-academy physical fitness programming and provide a basis from which implementation or modification of departmental fitness program may be considered.

Law enforcement organizations may be hesitant to implement training programs due to ambiguous legal implications. Specifically, the uncertainty surrounding policy directives relating to job task analyses, fitness testing procedures, physical fitness standards, and disciplinary actions addressing non-compliance are issues to be considered. It is suggested that police organizations consult with fitness experts and legal counsel to ensure that mandatory physical fitness initiatives are legally defensible and fairly administered to all sworn personnel.

Departmental fitness training programs can increase organizational efficiency while simultaneously benefiting each law enforcement officer. Certain lifestyle choices made by law enforcement officers may contribute to unhealthy practices or activities (Ayres 1990; Colligon et al. 1995; Mostardi et al. 1986; Quire and Blount 1995; Wood et al. 1982). Current studies cite various benefits that may be particularly advantageous to law enforcement personnel, including increased mental alertness, increased problem solving ability, prevention of excessive stress, promotion of emotional stability, and prevention of lifestyle-related diseases (Getchell 1992; Hockey 1993; International Association of Chiefs of Police 1979a; Reintzell 1990). Implementing on-going departmental fitness training may provide law enforcement personnel the means to achieve these benefits.

Additionally, as law enforcement officers become increasingly involved in the use of force litigation, administrators may wish to examine how physical fitness affects an officer's decision to increase his or her level of force when effecting arrest. Evidence suggests that even though crime is on the decline, perpetrators are becoming more violent. Poorly conditioned officers may resort to deadly force because they may be physically incapable of responding with a lesser, more appropriate degree of force. For example, in *Parker v. District of Columbia* (1988), the court held the police organization liable for failure to provide training in arrest procedures and for deficient physical fitness programs.

Conclusion

Research in the area of police physical fitness is limited and inconsistent, particularly concerning training that extends beyond preservice or academy-mandated requirements (House 1983; Jones 1992). For example, some researchers report only case studies of how a single law enforcement agency has initiated incumbent physical fitness programming (Arters and Aaron 1989; Getz 1990; McNeill and Prentice 1984; Nichols 1994). Others simply state that law enforcement officers are in poor physical condition and argue that police executives must invoke change (Charles 1983; Fay 1995; Kuntz 1988).

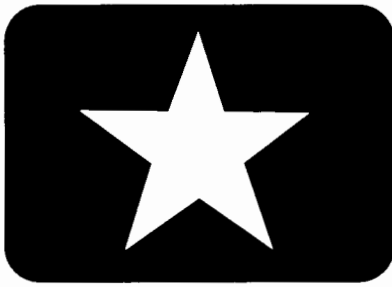
It has been suggested that physical fitness is not only beneficial to law enforcement officers but is an essential requirement for optimal job performance (Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research 1996; Collingwood 1996; Hoffman 1993). Although many Texas law enforcement agencies assess the physiological readiness of police candidates, there is considerable variation in specific testing procedures (Carmean 1984; Collingwood 1995; Gaines, Falkenberg and Gambino 1993; Hoover 1992; Lopez 1991). Because selection standards differ widely, incumbent physical fitness testing and programming may be even more difficult to develop. Although fitness standards may be in place during the hiring process, most incumbent personnel are not required to maintain any standardized level of physical performance (Charles 1983; House 1983; Nichols 1994; Serra 1984).

In sum, the importance of a well-designed departmental fitness program has been established. The benefits are clear and the important components which must be considered for proper implementation have been addressed. Careful analysis of this information can help policing organizations to better understand the many issues that must be considered when enacting a physical fitness program for their officers.

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