

# FRPHC makes mental healthcare a primary objective

■ BY MITCHELL KRUGEL

Officer Berardi (not his real name) doesn't feel good. It's not a cold or flu. It's not just the chronic back pain that has been keeping him up at night. And as of this morning, it's not constipation. Even though he worked a 12-hour shift and then took on a road job, it's not fatigue, either. He just doesn't feel good.

If he's taking advantage of the forthcoming innovation to elevate total healthcare for NJ State PBA members, Berardi will walk into a First Responders Partnership Healthcare Center (FRPHC) and get some urgent primary care. During the course of an exam, the primary care physician who sees him after virtually no wait might discover that Berardi had to remove a child from a home riddled with domestic violence on his tour and had to break up a fight on his road job.

"Could you be dealing with some extreme stress?" the doctor asks.

"Probably," he admits.

The doctor suggests that Berardi might benefit from mental health counseling or therapy.

"Oh spit," Berardi thinks. That means having to find a therapist, schedule an appointment and worry about it getting back to his department.

Not at the FRPHC.

The doctor tells the officer that help is less than a phone call away. It's down the hall, in fact. Because of its collaborative infrastructure and belief that physical and mental health require a truly holistic approach to care, the FRPHC will have mental health professionals on staff and in the facility.

The resources to provide PBA members treatment options will be so robust at the FRPHC that this very well could be the pathway members have been seeking for the mental health and wellness the profession increasingly demands. Expertise, ease of access, no barriers to treatment and confidentiality also give the FRPHC a cutting-edge platform for providing mental healthcare.

"Neurobiology is teaching us that vesting behavioral health into primary care has become incredibly important," advocates Doug Forrester, chairman and CEO of Integrity Health, which created the FRPHC concept and will open the first such center in Hamilton Township around April 2020.

"You can't have physical fitness without emotional fitness and expect to perform at the highest level," Forrester continues. "You need both to be effective, particularly for first responders because of that special burden they carry for public well-being."

So Officer Berardi is accompanied down the hall – no assessment, no appointment necessary – to visit with a therapist like li-

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**INTEGRITY HEALTH**  
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**The First Responders Partnership Health Center (FRPHC) is the most exciting health care news in many years for first responders!**

FRPHC is a collaborative effort of the first responder union leadership and Integrity Health, a well-known, New Jersey-based firm specializing in managing health plans from a patient-centered medical home platform called "Partnership Health Center".

**FRPHC Services will include:**

**Same-day appointments • Doctor visits • Required Medical Exams/Physicals • X-ray • Lab work  
 Rx • Physical Therapy • Chiropractic • Pain Diagnostics • Behavioral Health • Care coordination  
 Disease Management • Wellness & Nutrition**

**These services will be available to you and your family,  
 at a convenient location, from 7 a.m.-7 p.m., 7 days a week - 7/7/7**

The FRPHC will provide customized care by specially trained providers to meet the medical needs of first responders, and will eliminate:

- Delays in getting doctor appointments
- Shift work interfering with appointments
- Trouble with specialist referrals and lack of care coordination among them
- Providers unfamiliar with the unique health challenges of law enforcement.

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censed clinical social worker Jennifer McGarvey, who will be keeping office hours at the center. McGarvey huddles with the primary care physician for a briefing and then meets with Berardi to begin dealing with the stress and determine if a referral to another mental health resource might be best practice.

This is the collaborative approach to healthcare that aims to give members the caliber of care they feel they have been paying for since the onslaught of Chapter 78. Medical and behavioral health practitioners working hand in hand will get patients into the best possible treatment hands and is the model of the FRPHC.

(FYI: If a member comes into the center who might be suffering with addiction, the FRPHC will have access to treatment facilities like Princeton House Behavioral Health, which has exclusive programs for first responders.)

"I've already seen the benefits when I'm working with a client to be able to walk down the hall and talk to a doctor," confirms McGarvey, who works at Integrity Health's Partnership Health Center for Somerset County employees in Somerville. "Or if the doctor sees that somebody might be depressed, he can say, 'We have Jennifer here. Would you like to meet with her?' I can sit with them, get to know them a little bit and it's a beautiful thing. It's a one-stop shop and we all work together."

The FRPHC is developing protocols to provide counseling both onsite and through referrals because law enforcement officers, their bosses and their family members are beginning to realize that from time to time, they can all benefit from counseling. And having easy access to that counseling like they will at the FRPHC not only provides mental healthcare for officers when they want it or so they don't have to worry about making time for it, but so it can become a more normal endeavor to get it.

"We've got to stop treating them as if they are isolated," Integrity

Health Chief Clinical Officer Judy Lagana reasons. "If they don't know how to cope with something, they should know that isn't abnormal. They need to feel comfortable enough to seek out the right help to get them through the difficult times."

So if an officer feels the need to make the call for help, and they want to be able to make it to a facility where they can get that help right away, then calling the FRPHC becomes a very accessible option. Or if they want to make the call to a place where they will get complete confidentiality, the FRPHC is a viable option. And when the center does open, patients can count on therapists who are specially trained to work with first responders.

"We have a robust human resources and recruiting team to help us find professionals who understand the dynamics of the first responder lifestyle and what they go through day to day," Lagana adds. "Experience is key. Credentials are key. And quality outcomes are always key."

McGarvey wants PBA members to know what those outcomes might be.

"There's nothing better than when they tell me, 'I got my life back,' and that they are sleeping at night," she explains. "When they are going through stressful times in their lives, it pulls them away from things that are meaningful, like family, hobbies and activities they enjoy. We are helping people learn ways to take care of themselves."

Forrester reminds PBA members that the FRPHC will be their home base for care, with many pathways to find physical health and emotional fitness.

"No one should be discouraged from getting healthcare," he emphasizes. "We can remove a lot of the things that prevent them from getting it and get them in the hands of the right professionals."