Supporting Designated Crisis Responders (DCRs) in Washington State

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Supporting Designated Crisis Responders (DCRs) in Washington State
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**BACKGROUND**

Designated Crisis Responders (DCRs) are called upon to evaluate individuals who are exhibiting signs of a mental health crisis and may pose a danger to their self, others, the property of others, and/or are gravely disabled. DCRs evaluate the individual to determine if they meet the legal criteria for involuntary treatment for their mental health disorder. All DCRs have an advanced degree in mental health and typically have experience working in the mental health sector before their employment as a DCR. Despite their experience, certain mental health disorders are less frequently seen by DCRs, particularly individuals with eating disorders. The less frequent presentation of these individuals creates a knowledge gap for many in the mental health community, including DCRs. To help bridge these knowledge gaps, our psychiatry team offered education regarding eating disorders and guidance on how to apply the legal criteria for involuntary treatment of these patients.

**METHODS**

We made an education PowerPoint about the application of the Involuntary Treatment Act (ITA) in eating disorders. It included information on the different classifications of eating disorders based on DSM 5-TR criteria, education on the medical complications associated with those eating disorders, and a discussion of how to apply the legal criteria of the ITA in these settings. These points were then illustrated by case examples. We presented this PowerPoint to the Spokane County DCR team and then later recorded and uploaded it online so that they can reference it in the future. We also emailed the PowerPoint to the DCR supervisor at the request of several DCR team members, so that they could print the slides and have them easily available. DCR’s completed a pre- and post- education survey to determine the degree to which the PowerPoint improved understanding and comfort. Given the positive feedback from the participants on the first day, we offered the educational material to the Stevens County DCR team at the time of this submission.

**Application of Grave Disability**

**DCR Specific Law Language**

- “Gravely disabled” means a condition in which a person, as a result of a behavioral health disorder:
  - (a) is in danger of serious physical harm resulting from a failure to provide for his or her essential human needs of health or safety; or
  - (b) manifests severe deterioration in routine functioning evidenced by repeated and escalating loss of cognitive or volitional control over his or her actions and is not receiving such care as is essential for his or her health or safety; *(1)*

  *RCW 71.05.020*

  [https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=71.05.020](https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=71.05.020)

**Grave Disability Part A**

- “AN has the highest mortality rate of any psychiatric disorder” *(1)*
- Due to starvation-related medical complications
  - Electrolyte abnormalities (Potassium, Magnesium, Phosphorus)
  - Cardiac complications (low heart rate, low blood pressure, arrhythmias)
  - Low blood sugar
  - Refeeding syndrome
  - Nutrition


**Grave Disability Part B**

- “...choices seem more guided by the short-term outcomes (e.g., food intake and weight gain) and less by the longer-term outcomes (improved daily functioning)...”
- Studies showing smaller brain volumes as well as a global decrease in grey matter volume.
- Past failed attempts

*RCW 71.05.020*

**RESULTS**

Over half of the responders reported being called as a crisis responder to a patient with an eating disorder. However, only one responder reported obtaining someone for their eating disorder. It is unclear if this is directly related to how comfortable the DCR personnel feel with eating disorders. However, before our presentation, approximately 45% felt somewhat or very comfortable applying the involuntary treatment act to patients with eating disorders. After the presentation, this increased to approximately 75%. There was also a positive response in how the DCR personnel rated their general knowledge of eating disorders and the associated treatment of these eating disorders.

**CONCLUSION**

The Designated Crisis Responders play an important role in mental health crises for our community. Collaboration between DCR and the medical and psychiatric community has the potential to better support people in the community struggling with mental health crises.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Special thanks to the Spokane County Crisis Response Director, Stacey Okihara, who helped coordinate our educational presentations and to the Spokane County DCR participants who were all engaging and inquisitive during our sessions.

**REFERENCES**

2. [https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=71.05.020](https://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=71.05.020)

QI exemption letter was obtained from the Providence IRB