Police Have Higher Risk of Serious Illness

Philadelphia law enforcement officers, take note: a study of police officers in a major metropolitan police department reveals that their occupation appears to be linked to a variety of significant health problems. The researchers, from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the Centers for Disease Control, the University of Buffalo and other institutions, found that police have a higher risk than the rest of the population for negative long-term health effects.

The effects are both physical and mental and appear directly linked to the stressful nature of the work. Police who reported the highest levels of stress also were much more likely to have poor quality of sleep. The rate of suicide among working police officers was eight times higher than that of retired officers. While 32 percent of Americans are obese, the figure rises to 40 percent among police officers. Another alarming apparent effect of police work is a higher rate of brain cancer and Hodgkin's lymphoma among officers with 30 or more years on the force.

Besides the stress of dealing with dangerous situations, challenging work and people in crisis, police also suffer the effects of working nights. Almost half the police participating in the study worked at night, and over a fourth of the police in the study had metabolic syndrome. Metabolic syndrome is a cluster of symptoms, associated with night shift work, which leads to increased risk for stoke, diabetes and heart disease. Among the general population, only nine percent work a night shift, and only 18.7 percent have metabolic syndrome.

Unfortunately, police culture does not support a healthy

lifestyle, even though police have health insurance coverage. Police worry that if they reveal a physical weakness, they will be perceived negatively and could lose status. Also, officers may find it shameful to obtain mental health counseling.

To solve the problem, an author of the study recommends starting in police academy by training officers to recognize and seek treatment for symptoms of stress. Along with teaching new police about coping with the stress of police work, it will also be important to train management-level police to understand how to work with officers who need and request help.

Police and others who become sick or injured on the job may be eligible for workers' compensation or disability pay.

For those with questions, it is important to talk with an attorney who knows this area of law in order to fully exercise the right to these benefits.