Mindfulness in Firefighting: An OT Perspective on Supporting Firefighter Mental Health and Performance at Seattle Fire Department

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BACKGROUND

- Firefighters' psychological well-being, occupational balance, and performance are shaped by the environment and emotional/physical demands of their job.^{1,2}
- Mindfulness-based practices may support emotional regulation, interoception, pain management, and sleep across broad populations. Preliminary evidence supports its benefits for firefighters.³
- mPEAK is a mindfulness training program designed for people in high-stress occupations who want to improve their focus, performance, and success.⁴

PURPOSE

- Explore how Seattle Fire Department (SFD) firefighters perceive and engage with performance-based mindfulness training (mPEAK) in the context of mental health needs, institutional culture, and occupational demands.
- Develop recommendations to address barriers to mindfulness engagement, emphasizing integration with daily routines and roles to support occupational performance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS





PROCESS

NEEDS ASSESMENT

 Meetings with Behavioral Health Coordinator

- Literature Review
- mPEAK program material review
- In-depth interviews with nine firefighters
- Observation of training

OUTCOMES

Comprehensive written summary of interview findings and recommendations

Presentation to Behavioral Health Coordinator

FINDINGS

PROPOSALS

Firefighters report access constraints as a barrier to continued mPEAK practice and application

Implement
quarterly or
biannual mPEAK
refreshers to
review key skills
like box
breathing and
visualization

Firefighters need mindfulness training that addresses both medical and fire response

Adapt
curriculum to
include peer
support and
direct medical
response
application

Firefighters have difficulty applying mindfulness in high-stress moments and unpredictable firehouse routines

Embed mindfulness into existing activities and utilize these techniques during shift change

Firefighters report significant barriers to maintaining restorative and functional sleep

Utilize OT-based enhancements: environmental assessment, sensory modulation education & assistive technology

CONCLUSION

- Firefighter cultural acceptance/ engagement in mindfulness and institutional support are directly related
- Expanded and varied access points to training and practice opportunities are key
- A combined focus on leadership, mentorship, and peer support in mindfulness holds strong potential for shaping mindfulness-based identity development among firefighters

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Continue program evaluation including

 1) a larger group of firefighters across
 SFD and other counties and 2) firefighter perceptions of proposed
 recommendations
- Consider OT expertise in culturally sensitive sleep and sensory programming for firefighters

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