

FOR FIREFIGHTERS, EMOTIONAL STRESS OFTEN DEADLIEST OF ENEMIES

'PTSD FOR FIREFIGHTERS IS REAL'



VERO BEACH, Florida: In this photo taken Monday, Oct. 24, 2016, the American flag is flown at half staff and flowers placed in front of Fire Station 2, honoring Vero Beach Battalion Chief David Dangerfield.—AP

VERO BEACH, Florida: Battalion Chief David Dangerfield's nickname was "Super Dave," a moniker the veteran firefighter had earned over the years for his cheerful, get-things-done personality. The leader of a fire department dive team in a quiet Florida beach community of 15,000 volunteered for charities helping kids and families and was the 2013 Treasure Coast Emergency Service Provider of the Year.

But one Saturday night last month, Dangerfield posted a Facebook message that revealed a world of pain behind the brave facade. "PTSD for firefighters is real. If your love (sic) one is experiencing signs get them help quickly. 27 years of deaths and babies dying in your hands is a memory that you will never get rid off (sic). ... My love to my crews. Be safe, take care. I love you all."

He then drove to some woods, called 911 and told the dispatcher where his body could be found. He hung up and fatally shot himself. He was 48. Dangerfield's death shined a light on firefighters who suffer post-traumatic stress disorder, a problem most often associated with soldiers returning from war. Firefighters are finding that their long tradition of silent stoicism, and the belief that talking about one's demons is a sign of weakness that could isolate them from colleagues, has left many of them psychologically and emotionally damaged.

30 percent suffer from PTSD

The Firefighter Behavioral Health Alliance estimates about 30 percent of the nation's 1.3 million career and volunteer firefighters suffer from PTSD, with 132 suicides by active and former U.S. firefighters and paramedics reported last year. Officials believe those numbers are low because of misclassifications. Studies show firefighters are three to four times more likely to kill themselves than die in on-duty accidents. There have been recent national efforts to train firefighters to recognize PTSD and to remove the stigma of seeking help. But even knowledge can't save everyone. David Dangerfield became a firefighter in the 1980s, advancing through the ranks to a top position in the Indian River Fire Rescue Division in Vero Beach, a town of 15,000 known for its quiet beaches, retirees and as the Dodgers' former spring training grounds. Dangerfield founded and ran the firefighters chill cook-off for charity.

His team's work sometimes made the local news. He and a colleague found the severed body of a 9-year-old boy who had been attacked by a shark. He and his partners pulled mangled bodies from a small plane crash in a remote swamp and then sat with the corpses for hours before they could be removed. In 2014, Dangerfield recovered the body of a 16-year-old bicyclist who had been knocked off a bridge and into a lagoon by a car.

He told the Vero News that firefighters feel the families' pain. "It's difficult for us, too," he said. "It sticks with you."

Retired firefighter Blades Robinson, a dive team buddy, said Dangerfield had some difficulties over the past couple of years, including a divorce, but had been undergoing PTSD counseling. He had been promoted last year, bought a new house and truck. He seemed like his normal self. "We were all blindsided by his death," Robinson said.

Scott Geiselhart, a firefighter in Frazee, Minnesota,



VERO BEACH, Florida: In this photo taken Monday, Oct. 24, 2016, John O'Conner talks to a reporter.—AP

fought the same demons Dangerfield did - and would have died the same way but for some incredible luck. Geiselhart was viewed as a pillar of his community in Frazee, a town of 1,300 people tucked among the area's abundant lakes and home to "Big Tom," the world's largest turkey statue. He owned the local auto repair shop and was an assistant chief with the volunteer fire department, leading the crew that removes people when they are trapped, particularly after car accidents.

Geiselhart often found himself rescuing friends and neighbors. One night he chatted up a bartender about a necklace she was wearing. The next morning he pulled her body from her car's wreckage and found the necklace in the debris.

In 2010, Geiselhart and his team rescued a teenager who had driven into an icy swamp. He appeared to be recovering in the hospital. "Everything went perfect: It was an awesome, awesome rescue. It was just wow," said Geiselhart, 47. "I was celebrating, saying, 'We finally saved one.'" A month later, the teen died from a lung infection caused by inhaling water. Geiselhart blamed himself.

Nightmares

It wasn't long before the nightmares began, mostly about his two sons. "They would be burning to death or falling out of the sky and landing in the water and turning

to me for help and I was paralyzed. I couldn't help them. Or they would be in a car accident and the jaws of life wouldn't work or my arms wouldn't work," he said. "So I just decided I was never going to sleep again." He started taking meth to stay awake. It made his PTSD worse.

Everywhere he looked in town, something reminded him of someone he had seen dead or dying. He began yelling at his girlfriend and kids. He spent 23 hours a day at his repair shop, but spent much of his time staring at his surveillance monitor.

Finally, in 2014, he took his Smith & Wesson .44 Magnum, loaded it with six bullets, put it to his head and pulled the trigger. Click. The gun didn't fire. "I think it was God using my favorite gun to get my attention," he said. Geiselhart got help. He underwent psychotherapy, eye-movement desensitization and reprocessing, sometimes used to treat soldiers suffering from PTSD. It worked. He stopped using meth. He stopped being angry, even though he lost his auto shop. He's still a volunteer firefighter. "What's weird is that I'm in the worst financial shape of my life but I am the happiest I have ever been because I got my life back and I know there is a future," he said. "Something inside me is at peace." He now speaks to firefighters groups, urging them to seek help before it's too late. "I know how much strength it takes," he said. "It is far from a weakness."—AP

JUNO THERAPEUTICS HALTS STUDY AFTER MORE PATIENT DEATHS

WASHINGTON: Juno Therapeutics again halted its study of an experimental leukemia treatment Wednesday after two more patients died of complications. It was the second setback for the closely watched study, which was previously halted after two patient deaths in July. Company shares plunged more than 27 percent in frenzied trading.

The Seattle company said that the latest deaths occurred earlier this week after patients suffered a severe form of brain swelling, similar to the previous two fatalities. Company executives in July blamed the deaths on chemotherapy drugs used in a pre-treatment regimen, rather than on the company's experimental drug. The Food and Drug Administration granted researchers permission to resume the study several days later. Juno said Wednesday it's working with regulators to determine what to do next. The company's therapy, known only as JCAR015, is in mid-stage testing, a make-or-buy phase of development that usually focuses on effectiveness.

Juno's approach is part of a promising, but still unproven, approach that reengineers patients' immune systems to attack cancer. The company filters patients' blood to remove white blood cells called T-cells and genetically alters them in the lab so they can target cancer cells. They then return the modified cells to the patient. The company is studying several other gene-altering immunotherapies and said those trials will continue. Shares of Juno Therapeutics Inc. fell \$7.96, or 27 percent, to \$21.92 in afternoon trading.—AP

GERMAN COURT: BREAST IMPLANTS NO HINDRANCE TO POLICE WORK

BERLIN: A German court has ruled breast implants are no impediment to a woman becoming a police officer. The ruling by the administrative court in the western city of Gelsenkirchen Wednesday came after a 32-year-old woman appealed a police doctor's assessment that her silicone implants were likely to rupture during physically demanding law-enforcement work.

But the court heard expert testimony there was less than a 20 percent risk of an implant ripping or other painful problems, the dpa news agency reported. Nationwide police guidance says women with implants are not suited for police duty because of the injury risk, but other courts have also ruled otherwise. — AP

SEVERELY ANOREXIC PATIENT CAN REFUSE FORCED FEEDINGS

MORRISTOWN, New Jersey: A New Jersey judge has ruled a severely anorexic woman committed to a state psychiatric hospital two years ago can refuse forced feedings and granted her request for care to relieve pain or discomfort.

The 29-year-old Morris County woman, identified only as AG, weighs 69 pounds and has been a patient at Greystone Park Psychiatric Hospital in Parsippany since 2014. She told the court earlier this month she doesn't want food or water and would prefer instead to enter palliative care. Superior Court Judge Paul Armstrong in Morristown

granted her request on Monday and ordered her transferred into palliative care at the hospital.

The state attorney general's office contends the woman is not mentally competent due to her chronic depression. It said anorexia is not a terminal condition and had asked the court to approve force-feedings, requested by state Department of Human Services. The attorney general's office said the woman's depression could be treated using an experimental drug.

Doctors testified that the woman has been diagnosed with terminal anorexia-

nervosa. She told the court she would resist force-feedings, which are administered through a tube inserted through the nose and pushed down the throat. Her court-appointed lawyer, Edward D'Alessandro Jr., said his client's bone density is comparable to a 92-year-old's. She would be at risk for injury if restrained, he said.

Judge Armstrong determined the woman's testimony was "forthright, responsive, knowing, intelligent, voluntary, steadfast and credible." He said the woman's parents, doctors, psychiatrists, court-appointed medical guardian and

the ethics committee at Morristown Medical Center all supported her decision to refuse forced feedings.

"This decision was made by AG with a clear understanding that death was or could be the possible outcome," the judge said. Armstrong cited previous "landmark" cases where patients, their families, physicians, and their institutions were found to be "proper cooperators" in making difficult medical decisions. A spokesman for the state attorney general's office declined to comment on the order. It's unclear whether the state will appeal.—AP

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PAGE

248 33 199

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