Ethical questions arise when doctors support cops in the field

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Staff News Writer

Tactical medicine physicians have long provided vital support to law enforcement and military special operations teams by helping them navigate front-line crisis interventions and pre-hospital emergency care. But they now also play a crucial role in informing department- and agency-level policies that keep both members of the public and law enforcement officers themselves safe.

The February issue of AMA Journal of Ethics® (@JournalofEthics) explores the importance of tactical health to public health. It examines ethical questions around the nature and scope of collaborations between health professionals and law enforcement personnel before, during and after critical events.

Articles include:

1. "Should a Physician Ever Violate SWAT or TEMS Protocol in a Mass Casualty Incident?"
   Tactical emergency medical services (TEMS) personnel direct triage and resource allocation and administer immediate interventions.

2. "What Should Clinicians Who Care for Police Officers Know About Moral Injury?"
   When police officers and clinicians perceive a moral transgression committed by an agent responding to risk in the field, they are susceptible to moral injury.
"Why Care-Based, Not Carceral, Approaches to Suspects With Mental Illness Is Key to Whether We Trust Professional or State Authority Ever Again."
Police, prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges and parole boards look to reform work with patients.

"Crisis Intervention Team Program Leadership Must Include Psychiatrists."
Crisis intervention team programs are partnerships between police and the mental health community members developed with little involvement from psychiatrists.

Listen and learn

In the journal’s February "Ethics Talk" podcast, Amy Watson, PhD, professor at Helen Bader School of Social Welfare at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, discusses how crisis intervention teams can motivate efficiency and equity in tactical responses to 911 calls. She also outlines what community mental health intervention might look like when we think beyond the limits of law-enforcement response.

The February issue also features seven author-interview podcasts. Listen to previous episodes of the “Ethics Talk” podcast or subscribe in iTunes or other services.

Last year, the AMA House of Delegates adopted policy regarding police methods of crowd control.

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- How Should Clinicians Determine a Traumatized Patient's Readiness to Return to Work?
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- Why Care-Based, Not Carceral, Approaches to Suspects With Mental Illness Is Key to Whether We Trust Professional or State Authority Ever Again.
- Crisis Intervention Team Program Leadership Must Include Psychiatrists.
Ethics Talk: How Crisis Intervention Team Training Improves Safety.

Additionally, the CME module “Ethics Talk: How Crisis Intervention Team Training Improves Safety” is designated by the AMA for a maximum of 0.5 *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™*.

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