



“Stop, Drop, and Run,” Physical Fitness Program for Firefighters Created by Nurses at a Regional Burn Center

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Commentary

Historically, fire departments have worked in conjunction with the multidisciplinary team of nurses, doctors and other healthcare providers that care for thermally injured patients at burn centers. The close relationship and shared ideals between burn centers and fire department allows them to combine resources to better serve individual patients, but also the community at large through outreach and community education related to safety, fire prevention and injury prevention. These collaborations have actually resulted in burn centers being created through initiatives from firefighters, with well known, major burn centers as a result in many states across the country.

Firefighting is well established as a high risk profession, and unfortunately, 80-100 firefighters perish in the line of duty each year in the United States [1]. Surprisingly, burns and mechanical trauma are not the leading causes of firefighter mortality. The medical literature has established that most of these deaths are from heart attacks that occur during strenuous activity such as firefighting [2]. Of the 84 firefighter-of-duty deaths last year, 57 - nearly 70 percent - were due to heart attacks [1]. The U.S. Fire Administration has counted 63 firefighter fatalities in 2015 at the time this article was written; cardiovascular disease is the confirmed cause of 26, or 41%, of those deaths and suspected in another 29% [1].

Just as obesity is a skyrocketing statistic among the American population, myocardial infarcts, hypertension, strokes and other cardiovascular conditions are plaguing firefighters at such an alarming rate that top leaders in the fire community coast to coast are taking note. In fact, the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation is organizing an emergency U.S. summit on cardiovascular death to be held sometime in 2016.

In response to the cardiovascular disease epidemic, a program designed to encourage firefighter fitness was created by two burn nurses (who are also avid runners) at the Vanderbilt University Regional Burn Center in Nashville, Tennessee. Keeping the storied tradition of collaboration between burn centers and fire departments, the goal of the program is to facilitate regular exercise and awareness of the problem. Titled, “Stop, Drop and Run” the name is a play on “dropping weight” and the old safety adage, “Stop, Drop and Roll”

The program includes a weekly group three mile run in downtown Nashville. Participants are encouraged to exercise on their own, track their weight and the speed of their runs. Education about cardiovascular disease is also provided, and firefighters are encouraged to share it with their peers. More than 30 firefighters and burn unit staff members participated in the inaugural run on May 18, 2015. Now, in the fifth month of the run, more than 100 firefighters have attended on a regular basis. Participants empirically report weight loss, faster run times, feeling better overall and making other healthy changes in their lives. Concrete data is currently being collected as the program continues. Initially, participants were tracking their own running times, but now the nurses are keeping records. Participants self-report serial weight measurements at 3 month intervals. “Stop, Drop and Run” is an example of how nurses can reach out to make a positive impact in the local area. Cultivating these relationships between groups also lends itself to additional collaborations to benefit the populace. The hope of building community is growing, as is the message of living by example and doing our part to take ownership and responsibility of our health individually and as a team.

References

1. USFA Fatalities Database
2. Kahn SA, Woods J, Rae L (2015) Line of duty firefighter fatalities: an evolving trend over time. *J Burn Care Res* 36: 218-224.