



**Canadian Mental
Health Association**
British Columbia
Mental health for all

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NEWS RELEASE

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Helping Our Heroes: Front Line Emergency Workers 100% More Likely to Experience PTSD¹

National conference focuses on protecting the psychological health of front line workers

British Columbia — He didn't expect to experience nightmares, pursue isolation or contemplate suicide. JP was a warrior. He was tough. He wasn't someone who visited Dr. Summer Off. Mental illness was not going to happen to him.

But it did. JP Phaneuf, veteran, former paramedic and law enforcement officer, was hit hard by a cumulative mental stress injury. Like many front line workers, JP didn't receive the appropriate care and assistance from his various employers. Instead he just moved on from one front line role to another. When the same damaging experiences began to unfold with his current employer, a series of successful interventions created an environment where JP was able to return to work.

JP will share his experience and his learnings at the Canadian Mental Health Association's Bottom Line Conference on February 24, 2015 in Vancouver.

"I really want to connect with the decision makers and leaders and management of organizations to let them know that the old adage of managing the employee number, not the employee has to change," says JP. "Think about the bigger picture, to try to connect from a humanity point of view rather than just strictly a financial standpoint."



JP, who is based in Chilliwack, will be joined by Lt General Roméo Dallaire who will also talk about his own struggles with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The 12th annual Bottom Line Conference will offer a venue for front line workers, unions, employers, not for profit organizations and governments to come together to talk about lessons from the front line and answer the question: How can we better protect the psychological health of our front line workers?

It's a question not enough people are asking. Mental illness is hitting our front line workers like a sledgehammer. Between 2004 and 2014, 160 soldiers died by suicide. Last year, in a six month period, over 24 first responders took their own lives. It seems every month we are looking at headlines about a police officer who has died by suicide. It's time to start asking difficult questions. It's even more important to start listening to those who have answers. We need to better protect those who commit their lives to protecting us.

¹ A study out of the University of British Columbia found that emergency personnel such as doctors, nurses, paramedics and firefighters experience post-traumatic stress at twice the rate of the average population. In Canada, it is estimated that up to 10% of war zone veterans—including war service veterans and peacekeeping forces—will go on to experience post-traumatic stress disorder. Post-traumatic stress disorder is a type of anxiety disorder that can appear after a traumatic event. It's a damaging and deadly disease.

“The primary reason [I share my story] is so that someone that is going through it quietly on their own knows that there is help out there. I wish 20 years ago someone would have shared their story when I was starting down this path and I may have gotten treatment sooner. I didn’t ask for this to happen to me, I didn’t ask, my family didn’t ask, all we want to do is get help and move forward.”

To learn more, visit www.bottomlineconference.ca.

For more information and interviews:

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