



## FROM THE FIELD

He was 45 years old, with a pre-existing heart condition, with medical clearance from a physician, and he was taking a fitness test. He was a husband and a father of teenage boys. He died as a result of his pre-existing heart condition. Did I mention he was 45 years of age?

When we hit our forties we kind of become 'tweeners' again. We're young enough and think we're strong enough to replicate the feats of our youth and we believe we're still far away from retirement and the rest home.

The forties for most people are also a time of great responsibility - professionally to advance and to make more money, as a partner in a maturing relationship with all of its attendant challenges, as a parent to soon to be college bound children, likely as an important breadwinner to

one or more families, and potentially as a caregiver to aging parents.

As a result the forties can be a period of significant stress. As a public safety officer this represents a double whammy. And it would appear that the forties as a result are a particularly dangerous time for public safety officers.

## More Incidents

A state police agency in the NE that we have worked with lost four or five troopers in an 18 month period to cardiovascular disease - all of them in their forties.

Two independent, unpublished studies conducted by two separate state-wide health insurance providers examined claims due to heart disease and or heart disease related death among their insured police officers. ***The average age of the officers involved was 46 and 47 years of age respectively.***

No doubt more, real, very personal stories exist out there.

## **The Response**

The knee jerk reaction could understandably be to blame the fitness test or the fitness program. In fact just the opposite is indicated: incidences like those cited clearly provide part of the rationale for a program and or test in the first place.

No program or test will completely avoid all injuries or incidences – by its nature training and testing puts people at risk. So does the job. And both officer and agency have an interest in knowing that every sworn member is physically ready to do the job. A carefully planned and executed program will catch many more of these conditions and work to keep participants - officers in their forties, safe; safe in the field and off-duty as well.

We as fitness coordinators or program directors can encourage **regular health screens** and **medical examinations**, either as an individual or agency wide initiative. And pay particular attention to the signs and symptoms of

cardiopulmonary or metabolic disease during regular screens.

As a tweener, a guy in my forties, I want to believe I can still do the things I used to and that symptoms are only false alarms. After all, the spirit is always willing. Unfortunately, those nagging concerns can sometimes actually be symptoms and they should be heeded.

### **Sometimes the good guys do win!**

The state police agency mentioned above was able to get its collective bargaining units to agree to basic medical exams and blood work to the tune of \$25.00 a piece. During the first quarter of the year that the exams were made available, 2400 troopers participated. Five troopers were sent from the medical service provider directly to their primary care physician. Given the recent health record of this particular agency it would appear that a \$125.00 investment saved five troopers' lives and their families.

**Rest in God's Peace G.W. Whatley**