Strategies for Risk Reduction and Addressing Mental Health on Campus

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In recent years, the conversation around mental health on college campuses has gained significant momentum. Institutions of higher education are increasingly recognizing the importance of addressing mental health issues, both for the well-being of their students, staff and for creating a safer, more supportive campus environment. The intersection of mental health and campus security has become a crucial area of focus, requiring the implementation of comprehensive risk reduction strategies. As Brooke previously indicated, Public Health concerns are not going away and are considered a part of "The Next Big Risks."

Next month is Suicide Prevention Month and this can be an opportunity to help address mental health issues as they are prevalent among college students. Many are experiencing more anxiety, depression, and other conditions that impact their academic performance, social interactions, and overall well-being. According to the American College Health Association, a significant percentage of college students report feeling overwhelming anxiety and depression, with some even considering self-harm and suicide. The impact of these issues extends beyond the individual, affecting campus safety and security.

Campus security must recognize the signs of mental health distress and understand their role in providing a supportive response. By integrating mental health considerations into their response and procedures, campuses can better manage risk and ensure a safer, more inclusive environment for all students and staff.

Strategies to Consider:

1. **Enhanced Training for Security Personnel** – Campus security officers should receive specialized training to recognize signs of mental health crises and respond appropriately. This training, often referred to as Mental Health First Aid or Crisis Intervention Training (CIT), equips officers with the skills to de-escalate situations, communicate effectively with individuals in distress, and connect them with appropriate mental health resources. Question, Persuade and Refer (QPR) is another program which offers training on suicide recognition and response.

2. **Collaboration with Counseling Services** – Security departments should work closely with campus counseling and mental health services to create a coordinated approach to managing mental health crises. Establishing clear procedures for referrals and intervention can ensure that students and staff in need receive timely and effective support. Regular meetings between security management, mental health professionals and human resources can foster a collaborative environment and improve overall response strategies.

3. **Early Warning Systems** – Developing systems to identify students at risk before a crisis occurs is a proactive approach to campus safety. This might include monitoring academic performance, attendance patterns, and changes in behavior. By leveraging incident report data and

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feedback from faculty and staff, campuses can implement early intervention strategies to provide support before issues escalate.

4. **Crisis Response Plans** – A well-developed crisis response plan should include protocols for handling mental health emergencies. This plan should outline the roles and responsibilities of security personnel, mental health professionals, and other campus staff. Table-top exercises can ensure that all parties are prepared to respond effectively to a range of scenarios.

5. **Promoting Mental Health Awareness and Education** – Educating the campus community about mental health issues and available resources is essential for prevention and early intervention. Regular trainings, seminars, and awareness campaigns can help reduce stigma, encourage students and staff to seek help.

6. **Utilizing Technology for Support** – Leveraging technology can enhance mental health support and campus safety. Online counseling services, mental health apps, and emergency notification systems can provide students with additional resources and ensure timely communication in crisis situations. Implementing anonymous reporting can also help students seek help without fear of judgment.

Overall, addressing mental health on campus is a complex issue that requires a collaborative approach between mental health professionals, campus security, and the wider academic community. By implementing these risk reduction strategies, colleges can create a safer and more supportive environment for their students and staff. Prioritizing mental health not only enhances campus security but also fosters a culture of care and inclusivity, ultimately contributing to the overall success and well-being of the campus community.

Resources:
- Student mental health is in crisis. Campuses are rethinking their approach – APA 2022
- Mental Health on Campus – DMI KB
- Mental Health Screening (Free Online) - CCMH by PennState
- Suicide Prevention Month – SAMHSA
- Relevant Articles from Campus Safety Magazine:
  - **How 1:1 Communication Methods Improve Student Mental Health, Retention**
  - **Student Wellness: Schools Adopting Various Approaches to Boost Mental Health on Campus**
  - **College Mental Health: 59% of Students Have Anxiety, 43% Are Depressed**
  - Others…

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