**About the dataset: Police Involved Deaths**

**Case 1: According to the article written by Maria L. La Ganga and Tina Susman in the Los Angeles Times; Nov. 16, 2014:**

**James Boyd, a 38-year-old mentally ill homeless man who suffered from delusions, was camping illegally in the Sandia Foothills on March 16 of this year when Albuquerque police officers tried to arrest him.**

**During a standoff, Boyd waved two knives, and 41 officers from various agencies surrounded him. “Finally, when Mr. Boyd appeared to be surrendering, officers threw a flash bang at him, released a dog to take him down, and shot him with a taser rifle,” according to a wrongful death suit filed against the city. “As Mr. Boyd turned away from the officers, two officers shot three rounds each, hitting him three times, twice in his side and back and once on his arm.”**

**The incident was recorded on one officer’s helmet cam.**

**Boyd’s last words on the recording were, “Please don’t hurt me,” and “I can’t move.” Boyd was taken by ambulance to the University of New Mexico Hospital. His right arm was amputated and his spleen and intestine were removed. He died at 2:55 a.m. on March 17.**

**Four days later, Albuquerque police Chief Gorden Eden released video of the incident. He told reporters that Boyd had made “violent threats” against the officers, who first used “less-than-lethal” weapons to arrest him. “The officers perceived a direct threat to the canine handler when the shots were fired,” Eden said. “Do I believe it was a justified shooting? Yes. If you follow case law…there was a directed threat to an officer.”**

**More than a year before Boyd’s death, the U.S. Department of Justice began investigating whether there was a pattern of excessive force used by members of the Albuquerque Police Department, actions that violate the Constitution and federal law. On April 10 of this year, the DOJ found Albuquerque officers “too frequently use deadly force against people who pose a minimal threat and in situations where the conduct of the officers heightens the danger.”**

**Case 2: According to the article written by Richard Fausset in the Los Angeles Times; June 2, 2002:**

**A 4-year-old girl was killed Saturday morning when an auto-theft suspect being pursued by Los Angeles police ran a red light on a busy downtown street, causing a chain-reaction accident that knocked over a traffic light, crushing the girl, authorities said.**

**Joseph Arias, 29, who was selling socks a block away at Broadway and 6th Street, said the suspect and police were speeding. Police could not say how fast either were going.**

Perhaps surprisingly, both of these cases would be considered “police-involved” deaths. Police-involved deaths is a much broader data base than the often-assumed “police shootings”. It includes any incident in which police were called and a death(s) occurred. Understandably, concern about police involved deaths has become a very emotional and divisive controversy in this country. Allegations of racial bias and targeting abound; as does the charge that police often default to lethal responses when use of less force would have been sufficient. In response, policing agencies remind us that while in hindsight a lower level response may seem more reasonable, the choice of response “in the moment” is often informed by intangibles like perceived threat level, adrenalin surge and many other factors which are hard to measure after the fact.

In an attempt to examine the magnitude of the problem nation-wide, many people have begun to search for a database of police involved deaths of all types. It may be surprising to know that no one complete source of this information is being collected. **“The nation’s leading law enforcement agency [FBI] collects vast amounts of information on crime nationwide, but missing from this clearinghouse are statistics on where, how often, and under what circumstances police use deadly force. In fact, no one anywhere comprehensively tracks the most significant act police can do in the line of duty: take a life,” according to the Las Vegas Review-Journal in its series Deadly Force (Nov. 28, 2011).**

Recently a public charity called **Fatal Encounters** (501(c) 3 status) has taken on the challenge of collecting this data from all over the US and placing it into a single searchable database. The organization chose to consider only incidents occurring on or after January 1, 2000. It is entirely self-funded and run with volunteers. The only paid employees are data-entry assistants. In this Capstone, we will be examining this database and trying to extract meaning from it.

**Preliminary Discussion Questions**

1. Based on the two cases given above you can see that police-involved deaths is much more than simply police shootings. What other situations do you think would fit into this data base? Give at least three general scenarios.
2. Do you think that the number of police-involved deaths has increased, decreased or remained about the same since 2000? Why?
3. When two things occur together, we call that a correlation. Does that also mean that one thing causes the other? Why or why not?