

Did Grandview police use their crisis training - Kansas City Star, The (MO) - July 3, 2018

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Grandview police can proudly report that 100 percent of the department's 50-some officers have received the specialized Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training that helps law enforcement understand the mentally ill. But what's not clear is if the department followed that guidance Sunday when a Grandview officer shot and killed **Larry San Nicolas** outside his home.

Family members, including grandchildren, watched in horror as the officer fatally shot the 60-year-old husband, father and grandfather. His loved ones were held back as San Nicolas bled on the pavement.

San Nicolas had come out of the house brandishing a sword. Reports suggest that police used a megaphone as they tried to communicate with him. But shouted commands, a norm in policing, can agitate a mentally ill person, potentially raising tensions and escalating a situation until officers are forced to fire their weapons in self-defense.

San Nicolas was a diabetic, his wife said, and he was having a medical reaction to a lack of insulin. Insulin shock is not a rare condition. It's something that officers can understand and be prepared for encountering.

The Missouri Highway Patrol is investigating the shooting death and will need time to report its findings. Investigators should consider whether the officer's training in CIT was adhered to — or not — and why.

New research shows that mandating that an entire police force complete the 40-hour CIT program isn't considered a best practice. Developing a core group of highly specialized officers who are well-trained to deal with the mentally ill is preferred.

Grandview, though, has a relatively small police department. And it's commendable that every officer has completed this important training program. But the question is whether the department failed to develop a core team of officers with a higher level of expertise and contacts in the mental health community. Where were those officers on Sunday?

The Kansas City area has long been a leader in such training. The International CIT Conference will convene here in mid-August. But there is growing concern that by mandating training, departments inadvertently dilute the impact. Not every officer is the best fit for the SWAT squad. And not every officer is well-suited to develop an expertise in handling mental health issues.

Kansas City's new police chief has expanded the specialized CIT squad to five officers. In November, the Kansas City Police Department is rolling out an 18-hour mental health training program. All officers will receive that baseline training, and the department will maintain its core

specialized team. The department is also developing CIT programming for mental illness in youth and the elderly.

A hard truth is that mental illness is widespread across our cities and neighborhoods. Training that prepares police for these emergency situations is crucial.

Otherwise, the haunting words of San Nicolas' wife will be repeated again and again by other grieving families: "Why did you have to shoot him?"

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