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## Janesville schools have kits in case of tragedies

Story

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By Gina Duwe The Janesville Gazette and Leader-Telegram staff


JANESVILLE - Janesville school staff members are being trained how to treat casualties from a school shooting or other emergency as part of a local program that organizers say could be a national model.

All 1,200 Janesville school district staff members will receive training in tourniquet application, and about 900 Casualty Care Classroom Kits will be distributed in the schools.



"It's going to empower people," said Kevin Olin, school resource officer at Marshall Middle School.

"Hopefully this training will empower some teachers to realize they could really make a difference in situations," he said.



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Mercy Health System, the Janesville police and fire departments and the school district have teamed up to provide the kits in response to an active shooter tabletop exercise mediated by the FBI last winter.

They believe it is the first kit of its kind, said Dr. Christopher Wistrom, emergency medicine physician and associate EMS medical director for Mercy Health System.

"It's a kit that anybody can use," Olin said.

The tools also could be useful if a tornado or explosion wreaked havoc, he said.

The kits focus on preventable trauma deaths with tools to stop bleeding such as gauze, pressure dressings, materials to pack a wound and a tourniquet.

"Probably the biggest advantage of the kit is not the kit itself, it's probably the education that goes along with it," Wistrom said.

Superintendent Mary Ann Hardebeck of the Eau Claire school district said it sounds like Janesville's approach goes beyond the plans in place in Eau Claire, where city, county and school district officials have strategies in place to address responses to emergency situations, including incidents involving school violence.

"We also do have first-aid kits in all our schools as well as first responders who are trained to assist students who need medical care until emergency responders can get there," she said.

Still, Hardebeck said she is interested in learning more about the ground-breaking steps being taken in Janesville.

The Janesville kits cost \$9 to \$10. A state Department of Public Instruction grant is paying for the kits at Craig and Parker high schools, and the district is working to secure funding for the remaining kits, said Yolanda Cargile, director of student services.

Mercy is supplying the bags and information cards and buying the supplies at cost. Mercy physicians and members of the police and fire departments are serving as trainers.

Before the military reissued tourniquets to all soldiers about a decade ago, soldiers who were injured in combat and made it to a hospital had a 17 percent chance of dying, Wistrom said. Now, injured soldiers who reach the hospital have only a 2 percent chance of dying, he said.

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A stigma still surrounds tourniquets, he said, because people wrongly believe using one will increase the chance of amputation. A tourniquet can be used for six to eight hours without increasing the risk of amputation, he said.

Soldiers returning from war without an arm or leg are alive because tourniquets lessened their loss of blood, but the tourniquets were not the cause of the amputations, he said.

School administrators already have finished the training, which for staff begins next week.

Staff members complete a survey about their first aid comfort levels and watch a nine-minute video before attending the training, which includes a 10-minute lecture and questions before hands-on instruction using mannequins and tools in the kit. Staff complete the survey again to measure the impact of the training.

The two main causes of post-traumatic stress disorder are the feelings of helplessness and terror, Wistrom said.

"A fair number of people involved in these situations (who) have significant, long-lasting psychological effects are from feeling helpless and the terror that goes along with that," he said. "Now, the teachers are empowered and have the ability to act in these situations and do something proactive."

Principals who have completed the training thanked Cargile for the program.

"I think it empowers them with the tool that they need versus just wondering, 'What can I do?' and feeling helpless," Cargile said.

The United States averages one school shooting every two weeks, Wistrom said.

Wistrom and law enforcement members found no model for their kits during an extensive literature review, he said.

"We built this from the ground up," he said.

A similar effort is underway in Oak Creek, he said.

"I do truly believe we have the simplest and cheapest system right now that's going to be in place," Olin said.

Several area school districts have expressed interest in the program, but Wistrom said he has been focused on rolling out the Janesville program smoothly before expanding.

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A special agent from the FBI's Milwaukee office has looked at the program and said it should be considered for a federal model, Wistrom said. He will continue to work with authorities as the program grows.

"I pray that they're never used; I really do," Wistrom said.

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