The NFPA 1582: One Firefighter's Story

Paid physicals geared toward firefighters are now available. What are you waiting for?

One of the first categories that made its way to the Coggle was "Zero Firefighter Casualties." The health and well-being of members is a priority for Chief Mike Myers, and he believes that the NFPA 1582 Physical is an important part of the puzzle. The NFPA 1582 Physical is a holistic medical surveillance program that is designed to track the unique health needs of the modern firefighter. When Chief Myers arrived, he was surprised to find that this physical wasn't already embedded in our wellness program as a paid benefit. Chief Myers and Local 43 were able to work together to make a paid NFPA 1582 physical a reality, and now the program has been in effect for a year.

And while those in the fire service know more than most that prevention saves lives, the number of firefighters who have taken advantage of the program is still lower than it should be. "I have personally seen this program catch important health issues and save someone's life," Myers said. "I have seen this program catch something major, we need to start working on it now." Ziegler says to take the physical for yourself, but more importantly, for your family.

During the initial stress test at Dr. Kuehl's office, they noticed a heart rhythm that seemed unusual, so Ziegler was sent for another type of stress test that found that this abnormality was a false-positive, which means nothing bad was ultimately discovered.

Ziegler's blood pressure, however, was found to be stage 1 hypertension (an upper number of 140-159 and/or lower number of 90-99) and much higher when exercising. But Dr. Kuehl counseled Ziegler on taking Vitamin D (a common deficiency in the Pacific Northwest) and most importantly, starting on a low dose of blood pressure medicine. That last one was literally and figuratively a bitter pill for Ziegler to swallow. As a Peer Fitness Trainer and someone who has made physical fitness a defining feature of his life, Ziegler thought that taking blood pressure medication seemed to be a sign of weakness. "I felt that if you take medications, it's saying that you've got something that you're trying to take care of that you can't do on your own," he says. "But I know it's something that you need to deal with and Dr. Kuehl helped me see that. And if you don't get the physical, you just don't know."

Ziegler now tests his blood pressure regularly. A recent reading was 118/80 on his right arm and 118/78 on his left arm, a normal result. While Ziegler still feels disappointed that he has to take medication, he is revealing details of his medical history for all Cogglevation readers to see because he wants to help wipe away the stigma of this part of the firefighter wellness strategy, and more importantly, he wants others to go get the NFPA 1582 physical. Now that people are starting to get the physicals, he finds himself having good conversations with colleagues about their health. And he has talked to other people who have high blood pressure, too.

He knows that some firefighters might be apprehensive because they think that the physical might find something that will affect their ability to work, even though the physical is not punitive. "What really affects you financially is if you're not around. You have to look at the end game: what is the value of your life?" he says. "Do it for your family and your co-workers (which are like family) and especially yourself. The sooner you can find some things out, the better off you will be. Because if there's something major, we need to start working on it now."

ANNUAL RECOMMENDED TESTS

- Vitals: BP, HR, RR, Wt, Body Fat Percentage
- Multi-System PE: skin, mouth, thyroid, vascular, neurologic and musculoskeletal
- Labs: CMP, CBC, Lipid Panel, TSH, Urinalysis, Hba1c
- Testing: 12-lead EKG, eye exam, hearing test, oxygen saturation
- Family History: CVD, sudden cardiac death, diabetes and cancer
- Personal Health Behaviors: tobacco use, alcohol, exercise, dietary habits

HOW TO GET AN NFPA 1582 PHYSICAL

If you're insured by Moda:

Dr. Kuehl's practice at OHSU has added two additional doctors to cover PF&R physicals and currently the wait is now about two weeks for an appointment.

Call 503-494-6813 to make an appointment.

If you're insured by Kaiser or are going to another physician:

Print out the International Association of Fire Chief's checklist to present to your doctor so they understand all the tests you will need. You can find this form at:

www.portlandoregon.gov/fire/ NFPA1582Checklist

Insurance/Benefits representatives will be available during Health and Wellness Training Blocks.

You can also call City of Portland Benefits at 503-823-6051