



Hisam Goueli

City Council Position 8

#seattleismyhome

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Dr. Hisam Goueli on Police De-escalation Policy

The killings of Charleena Lyles in Seattle and Michael Rude from Kent have shown us that there is an immediate need for our police to be better trained to interact with people with mental illnesses. I have worked in mental health care as a hospital psychiatrist for 13 years. I see agitation and aggression every day from patients, a significant portion of whom are also homeless and poor.

Our society has chosen to deny people with mental illnesses the compassion and dignity they deserve by providing them with inadequate health care and social services. We must take care to ensure they don't die when they interact with the police.

Here are three immediate actionable items we can do to save lives:

1. The SPD currently provides crisis intervention training. I believe we should add to this training by requiring all SPD officers to spend 40 hours receiving mentorship and skills-based learning in emergency psychiatric services. A curriculum could be developed that educates officers in the following areas:
 - Facial emotional recognition
 - Verbal de-escalation
 - Creating a culture of safety
 - Establishing rapport
2. We should coordinate with police and social services to provide integrated care plans for "frequent utilizers"—people who make frequent use of emergency care for mental health issues. A similar policy where I worked in Atlanta reduced hospitalizations and costs by half. This is a policy for more compassionate care and cost savings.
3. We should require police officers to learn and carry non-lethal means for disarming people with mental illness when required. We need to develop policies for engaging people who are impaired or dangerous in non-lethal ways.

I want to impress upon readers that mental illness is not a choice people make. These illnesses are serious and require effective, compassionate treatment strategies. We should reform our health care system to better serve people with mental illness; but we should also empower our police to serve as allies.

It is the responsibility of the police, as paid protectors of the peace, to de-escalate high-tension situations and act always for the preservation of life. With smart and coordinated policies, and a perspective that treats people with mental illnesses with respect and empathy, we can improve outcomes, cut costs, and save lives.

Short Video on Police Accountability: <https://youtu.be/N7vQaY67aQU>

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