

Deputies trained to help those with memory loss

By **Magen Kritsch** - 2/11/20 3:51 PM

Local law enforcement agencies get calls that involve people who are struggling with a memory loss disease frequently.

The Johnson County Sheriff's Office has gotten calls to help an elderly person who had dementia and wandered away from home, and to help Alzheimer's patients who were being abused and scammed out of their life savings.

About 180 sheriff's deputies and police officers from other agencies received specialized training last month, learning strategies that will help them in better understanding someone who is suffering from a memory loss disease when they respond to similar calls.

Melanie Perry, American Senior Communities Director of Memory Care Support Services, provided the training on dementia and elderly abuse to the officers.

Law enforcement officers are required to do 12 hours of training annually for the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy. Dementia and memory care were touched upon in previous years, but nothing in depth had been done in awhile, said Jimmy Engmark, training officer for the Johnson County Sheriff's Office.

The number of elderly people in the county is growing, and it was time for a more in-depth training to give officers multiple tools they can use to help the person and their families, Engmark said.

"I thought it was something that we needed more time on," he said.

The training touched on how officers could recognize elderly abuse, how to get those folks help, how to talk to the family and what resources and tactics they could be given about how to help, Engmark said.

Officers most often come into contact with someone who has dementia or Alzheimer's disease when they have wandered from home and can't remember how to get back. Tips on how to find those people and talk to them were a large part of the training, said Duane Burgess, Johnson County Sheriff.

"It's how to deal with it when you find these folks and how to help them," Burgess said.
"Whatever we can do to assist them in that moment."

Part of that training involved the officers understanding the science behind the diseases, and the fact that someone grappling with a disease that causes memory loss won't always understand what is happening around them.

"We want our officers to understand this isn't a curable disease," Burgess said.

Officers who took the training worked with a K9 dog that is also specially trained to find humans, and learned various search tactics they may not have known before, Engmark said.

"There (are) more tools in the toolbox than just putting up a drone," he said.

Elderly abuse was also part of the training. Officers also learned how to spot signs of elderly abuse, including who might abuse someone who is elderly and what that abuse might look like, Engmark said.