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**UCF RESTORES® Partners to Roll Out No-Cost, Tech-Based Initiatives  
to Address Mental Health Concerns Amid COVID-19**

*Programs Include Statewide Database of Culturally Competent Mental Health Providers,  
Social Media-Hosted Educational Sessions and Telehealth Clinical Services*

**ORLANDO, Fla. (April 13, 2020)** – [UCF RESTORES](#), a leading clinical research center devoted to changing the way post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is understood, diagnosed and treated, is delivering a host of new solutions designed to promote connectivity in a time of isolation. As individuals, families and communities continue to battle the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, UCF RESTORES and its partners at the [Florida Firefighters Safety & Health Collaborative](#) (FFSHC) have banded together to bring life-saving resources to those in need, including the launch of a telehealth clinician database, evidence-based educational programming and virtually accessible mental health treatment services – all of which are currently live and available at no cost to those affected by trauma.

In partnership, UCF RESTORES and the FFSHC have developed and published a comprehensive database of licensed mental health clinicians certified in cultural competency through the FFSHC's [Clinician Awareness Program](#), an immersive course that educates providers on the unique stressors first responders face, enhancing their ability to more effectively connect with and treat front-line heroes in times of crisis. The database spans all corners of the Sunshine State and is currently available online at [FloridaFirefighterSafety.org](#). The resource is free and available to the general public, offering those in need the opportunity to seek out access to telehealth services currently available across the state.

In the coming weeks, UCF RESTORES and the FFSHC will publish a second database, populated with a statewide network of first responders trained to provide direct, peer-to-peer support and mentorship. The development of this database is made possible by the diligent and strategic networking efforts of existing peer support mentors within the FFSHC that have exercised and deployed their expertise to provide crucial support to their brothers and sisters for more than four years.

The establishment of these databases serve as the latest evolution of Redline Rescue™, an initiative designed to efficiently, compassionately and anonymously support at-risk first responders – including firefighters, EMS professionals, paramedics, medical personnel and more – in their greatest hours of need. Development of Blueline Rescue, a sister initiative designed to open the virtual doors to advanced peer support for police officers and other members of law enforcement, is also underway. Both initiatives have been and will continue to be collaboratively managed by the FFSHC and UCF RESTORES.

“We have an entire network of first responders and medical care workers that are experiencing unprecedented challenges. They are on the front lines of defense, protecting their communities from an untamed attack that is crippling us globally,” said Dustin Hawkins, FFSHC mental wellness director and Indian River County Fire Rescue engineer. “They make the daily choice to mask up, glove up and remain in service. The publishing of the Redline Rescue peer support database – one that places culturally competent connectivity at the forefront – could not have come at a more critical time as so many are placing their lives on the line like never before.”

While clinical researchers and mental health professionals across the world [explore the potential connection](#) between a continued increase in completed suicides and “hidden victims” of the pandemic, first responders have already witnessed an uptick in mental health-related fatalities firsthand.

“We have seen a rise in completed suicides – a tragedy that does not discriminate based on economic class or walk of life. This pandemic has taken thousands of lives and we have yet to see the worst of it,” Hawkins added. “Making this database available is just the next step for us, and we look forward to sharing more updates soon. Now is the time for us to do our part, especially for those fortunate enough to do so from within the safety of their homes – not just with thoughts and prayers, but with activity and action.”

Beyond support of the Redline Rescue peer support database launch, UCF RESTORES faculty and staff have developed a course of virtual, interactive educational sessions designed to address stressful disruptions that are likely to stem from COVID-19. The series of videos – the first of which went live the morning of April 13, 2020 – will be hosted on UCF RESTORES’ Facebook page ([@UCFRESTORES](#)) and will allow viewers to engage with the organization’s team of licensed mental health professionals. The series – developed for all individuals, regardless of professional occupation – will cover a wide range of topics, including healthy coping mechanisms, the importance of proper sleep hygiene, techniques to effectively navigate familial relationship challenges and the importance of leaning on social support in trying times.

“Our goal is that the information, insights and tools made available in this series will not only alleviate some of the anxiety, fear and uncertainty so many are feeling right now, but that they will also serve as catalysts for critical conversations related to mental health,” said UCF RESTORES Director Deborah Beidel, Ph.D., ABPP. “If those conversations lead our heroes and their families to a place where a need for further support is realized, we are prepared, equipped and eager to serve them.”

To further advance accessibility to its services, UCF RESTORES has adopted a telehealth model to continue providing its clinical treatment to first responders, law enforcement, veterans, active-duty military personnel, survivors of sexual assault and mass violence, and others affected by trauma. These virtual services – including the research center’s unique, three-week

intensive outpatient program – are currently available at no cost to individuals affected by trauma and suffering from PTSD.

“At UCF RESTORES, we believe in the power to restore hope and healing to lives, families and communities, both in the midst and aftermath of traumatic crisis. As our essential workers rally to protect and serve us in a way we’ve never seen before, we are so grateful for the opportunity to give back by expanding the services and resources we can offer to our heroes, their families and so many others that are affected by this pandemic,” Beidel continued. “Now more than ever, it’s so important to remember that while we shelter, they serve.”

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### **ABOUT UCF RESTORES®**

Established in 2011 on the core mission of restoring lives, families and communities, UCF RESTORES is working to change the way PTSD is understood, diagnosed and treated. The research center’s first-of-its-kind intensive outpatient program leverages a multidisciplinary treatment approach, incorporating exposure therapy, group treatment and new, emerging technologies to reduce the distressing symptoms that often accompany a traumatic event. This evidence-based treatment approach has seen unprecedented success, with 66% of participants with combat-related PTSD and 76% of first responders no longer meeting the diagnostic criteria for PTSD following treatment.

For more information, visit [www.ucfrestores.org](http://www.ucfrestores.org) and follow UCF RESTORES on [Facebook](#).

To learn more about the Florida Firefighters Safety & Health Collaborative, please visit [www.floridafirefightersafety.org](http://www.floridafirefightersafety.org). Follow the collaborative on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).