WOMEN FIREFIGHTER COMPREHENSIVE PHYSICAL EXAM TEMPLATE

Dear Primary Care Provider:

Thank you for providing medical care to women firefighters. Firefighters are at high risk for premature structural heart and coronary artery disease from the extreme cardiovascular demands of fighting fires and exposures to carbon monoxide and hydrogen cyanide during these events. Acute and chronic exposure to human suffering and sleep deprivation pose significant mental health risks to firefighters and new studies raise the concern for even higher rates of PTSD and suicidal ideation in female firefighters.

Firefighters are exposed to numerous cancer-causing chemicals from the byproducts of combustion and from diesel exhaust fumes in the firehouse. These carcinogenic chemicals are absorbed, inhaled, and ingested into the firefighters' skin, airways, and gastrointestinal system. Well researched government and university studies demonstrate that firefighters have significant risks for developing respiratory, gastrointestinal, genitourinary, skin and blood cancers. Exposures to endocrine disrupting chemicals add additional risks to female firefighters for reproductive system disorders and cancers.

Women firefighters should be considered "high-risk" patients because of these unique exposures and deserve comprehensive physicals and screening tests for prevention and early detection of heart disease, cancer, and behavioral health issues annually.

Recommended Women Firefighter Physical Exam and Screening Tests

o Blood pressure, pulse	o Comprehensive metabolic panel
o Respiratory rate and temp.	o Liver function tests
o Oxygen saturation	o Hepatitis profile
o Weight and body-fat index	o Complete blood count
o Thorough skin exam	o Thyroid panel
o Eye and hearing exams	o Hemoglobin A1c (for diabetes monitoring)
o Throat and thyroid exam	o Fasting lipids and blood glucose
o Heart and lung exam	o Urinalysis
o Abdominal exam	o EKG
o Waist circumference for metabolic syndrome	o DEXA for osteoporosis screening o HPV Vaccine
o Fecal occult blood testing	o Mammograms **(begin age 35)**
o Musculoskeletal exam	o Low-dose chest CT scanning **(begin age 50)**
o Vascular exam	o Colonoscopy (**begin age 40 and every 5 years**)
o Neurological exam	o Pulmonary function test every 3 years
o Annual pelvic and Pap exam	o Exercise stress echocardiogram test (**begin age 40** and every three to five years)
o **Behavioral health screenings:** anxiety, depression, PTSD, suicidal ideation, sleep disorders, smoking, and self-medicating behaviors with alcohol and drugs	

I have gained a unique perspective and understanding of the tremendous dangers and health risks associated with firefighting from my 20 years of combined experience as a Boston firefighter and the department physician for the BFD. Now, as a practicing PCP who treats many female firefighters, I am convinced that these screening protocols work. They are very effective tools for early detection and prevention of these serious occupational related illnesses.

These high rates of cancer, heart disease and behavioral health conditions in female firefighters are no longer acceptable. Thank you for taking the time from your busy schedules to review these medical surveillance evaluations for firefighters. I do hope you seriously consider using these screening protocols for all your women firefighter patients.

Sincerely,

Michael G. Hamrock, MD

(Dr. Hamrock is working closely with the Firefighter Cancer Support Network to help prevent occupational injuries and illnesses in firefighters. He practices primary care and addiction medicine at Steward St. Elizabeth's Medical Center in Boston, MA.)