Suicide
Our Dirty Little Secret
Kirk E. Mittelman, BS, NREMT-P

Class Objectives
• At the conclusion of this session the student will be able to:
  • Evaluate the warning signs of suicide
  • Discuss ways to deal with those thinking of suicide
  • Determine if EMS could make a difference on a suicide call
  • Evaluate who is the real victim of suicides and how to help them

Let’s Get Up

Myth OR Reality
• Everyone has mental illness problems at some point.
• Only a small percentage of mental health patients are violent.
• Perfectly healthy people may have symptoms occasionally.
Attitudes Toward Death 1 of 3

- Changes in society have changed people’s attitudes toward death.
  - Life expectancy has increased.
  - Family mobility may mean less support for grieving people.

Attitudes Toward Death 2 of 3

- Death no longer occurs at home
  - Rest Homes
  - Accident Scenes
- Dead loved ones now kept at a funeral home instead of at home
  - Making people less familiar with death.

Attitudes Toward Death 3 of 3

- Death is something we all have to face.
- Coming to grips with death is part of delivering care.

REASONS FOR SUICIDE (1 OF 2)

- DEPRESSION
- FAMILY LOSS
  - Geriatrics?
- JOB LOSS
- DIVORCE
- MONEY PROBLEMS
REASONS FOR SUICIDE (2 OF 2)

- MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES
- JUST HAVE TOO MUCH GOING ON
- COMPILATION OF ISSUES
- POOR COPING SKILLS
- ALCOHOL/DRUG ABUSE

Why Else Might Someone Do This?

Suicide: Things To Remember

- Attempted suicide is a cry for help.
- Immediate intervention is necessary.
- Suicidal patients will usually exhibit warning signs.
  - Let’s look at some of them...

SUICIDAL MAY BE CLOSE (1 of 3)

- DISCUSSES IT
- NOTE WRITTEN
- PLAN IN PLACE
- HANDS YOU IMPORTANT ITEMS
- PAST HISTORY
  - Attempts or Destructive Behavior
Suicide Could Be Imminent (2 of 3)
- Hands you gun
- Wants to meet face to face
- Affairs in order
- Unreasonable demands
- Wants to see estranged family

The Pressure Is On (3 of 3)
- Vacant look or stare
- Avoids eye contact
- Air of tearfulness or sadness
- Deep despair
- Avoids talking about the future

Suicide By Cop?
- This is a reality you will be faced with.
- Are there any warning signs?
- What is the Officer thinking?

WHAT DO I SAY
- Are you going to commit suicide?
- Do you have a plan?
- Do you have a weapon?
  - Where is it?
- Have you thought about?
  - Family
  - Closed casket vs viewing
  - Loss of life insurance
What Do I Do? (1 of 3)
• Be prepared to spend extra time
• Get a plan of action worked out
• Identify yourself
• Assess and reassess the scene
  • Scene Safety Is Imperative To YOU

Can I Do More? (2 of 3)
• Avoid getting too close
• Stay with the patient
• Avoid fighting with
  • Patient
  • Family

Helpful Items (3 of 3)
• Express interest in patient
• Stay CALM
• Be Direct and Honest
  • But Reassure
• Never Judge
• Walk A Mile Theory

It’s Too Late
• Who is the real victim of suicide?
• Our profession is not immune.
Suicide Hits Close To Home

- Who knew or knows someone?
- What were the warning signs?
- What could we have done?

Dealing With The Shock (1 of 2)

- Do helpful things
- Make simple suggestions
- Be Honest
- Act calm

Dealing With Family (2 of 2)

- Be yourself and sincere
- Avoid sad and grim comments
- Orient family to procedures
- Not the time for a case of the giggles

Grieving Process

1. Denial: Refusal to accept, “Not me”
2. Anger: Blaming others or “why me”
3. Bargaining: Promise to change, “Ok but let me…”
4. Depression: Open expression of grief, “OK, but I haven’t…”
5. Acceptance: The simple “yes”, “OK, I’m not afraid”
A Case History

- History of Mental Illness
- Son also has History
- Suicide Pact
- Warning: This is graphic!
Can The Incident Affect You?

- It almost goes without saying

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN YOU

- Feeling of guilt
- Feeling of helplessness
- Anxiousness
- Inability to Concentrate
- Inability to make decisions
- Loss of appetite
- Over eating
- Loss of interest in work
- Loss of interest in sexual activities
- Irritable
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs

Taking Care Of #1

- CISD
- Nutrition/Water/Fluid
- Change of stations
- Talk to your partner
- Change shift hours
- Balance time and time to self
- Date night
- Call your mom

In Summary

- Life Is Short
- Live Everyday Like It May Be Your Last
- Bring Everyone Around You Up
- SMILE EVERYDAY
- REMEMBER:
- You Can Only CHANGE...
  What You CONTROL
Does Time Allow?

- Magic Carpet Ride
- Take Care Of Your Mind

Thanks

- Thank You
- Kirk Mittelman
- (801)581-8486
- www.mtnebotraining.com
- Kirk.Mittelman@hsc.utah.edu