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Contact: Pam McKeown
(405) 248-9233

For Immediate Release

ODMHSAS “Zero Suicide” Initiative

The goal of “zero suicide” in Oklahoma is what drove hundreds of mental health professionals to a three-day training hosted recently by the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS).

The “Zero Suicide Academy: Pursuing Perfection” was attended by representatives from various service providers throughout the state, said ODMHSAS Senior Director of Treatment Services Jackie Shipp.

Presenters included national experts on suicide prevention, including Dr. Mike Hogan of The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention; Dr. Brian Ahmedani, Director of Research for Behavioral Health Services at the Henry Ford Health System; and screening protocol expert Becky Stoll, Vice-President of Centerstone.

ODMHSAS invited Hogan to Oklahoma to meet with Community Mental Health Center directors in 2015, kicking off the Zero Suicide Initiative within the treatment and recovery system. From there, a clinical workgroup developed a screening and treatment protocol adopted system-wide with CMHCs. “These activities dovetailed well with the activities of our Prevention Division,” said Shipp. The Prevention Services Division worked with primary care and emergency room settings across Oklahoma.

Shipp said every person who receives mental health or substance abuse treatment services through the statewide behavioral health system is screened and assessed for suicide risk. An evidence-based treatment created specifically to treat suicidality, the Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality (CAMS), is offered for those who screen at imminent risk.

People with a mental illness, especially depression, often are at a high risk of suicide, with some studies noting their risk at 12-16 times that of the general population.

“We know that the people who are already in care can be at a heightened risk for suicide, particularly those with serious mental illness and co-occurring disorders,” said Shipp. “Comprehensive suicide prevention programs, which include intensive follow-up of at-risk patients, have been shown to reduce re-admittance rates and save lives.”

Since 2014, ODMHSAS has trained more than 1,200 mental health professionals in the CAMS protocol, so Oklahomans experiencing a suicidal crisis who seek treatment at a CMHC will receive effective care to help reduce their risk and keep them safe, Shipp said.

Through its Prevention Services Division, ODMHSAS also has provided training and technical support to more than 18 healthcare systems across Oklahoma to improve treatment protocols and standards of care to keep patients safer. Additionally, working with the Oklahoma Hospital Association, ODMHSAS provided technical assistance and materials to 55 hospitals throughout the state.

The healthcare system, in general, is one of the best places to implement a suicide prevention program, Shipp said.

Some national studies have shown that a third of those who died by suicide visited a physician in the week before they died – and a full 50% visited a physician in the month before they died. Exiting the ER is especially risky, as one in 10 suicides are by people seen in an ER within 2 months of dying.

“Many of these people were never assessed for suicide risk, so clearly this represents an opportunity for the healthcare profession to intervene,” Shipp said. “Suicide is preventable, especially for those in the care of health or behavioral health systems. To effectively reduce the risk of suicide, organizations must be trained to identify patients at risk of suicide and then intercede to prevent suicide in those patients.”

“Most people who die by suicide don’t really want to die,” she added. “They just want the pain to go away. Whether a person is struggling with depression, addiction or relationship issues, suicide should never be an option. Help is available and treatment works.”

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

If you or someone you know is in crisis, please call [1-800-273-TALK \(8255\)](tel:1-800-273-TALK).

ODMHSAS offers a continuum of services through its facilities along with many area-contracted mental health and substance use community providers. For additional information, visit odmhsas.org or call 1-800-522-9054 to find nearby mental health and substance use prevention, treatment and recovery services.

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