

Corallo Chaney: Driving suicides to zero in the Valley and beyond

By Dr. Karen Chaney

As we observe National Suicide Prevention Week (Sept. 8-14) and World Suicide Prevention Day (Sept. 10), we have the opportunity to gain a better perspective on people struggling with thoughts of ending their lives and on those most at risk of doing so.

For people thinking about suicide, the pain is unbearable. People's deep depression tells them that they are a burden and that everyone would be better off without them. They feel disconnected and alone. Taking their life begins to seem like their only choice—not to punish someone, or to prove something, or to get attention, but because they desperately want the pain to end.

Many groups are at high risk for suicide, including veterans, GLBT youth, and Native Americans. But the highest-risk group is those living with a serious mental illness (SMI). They are six to 12 times more likely to end their lives than people not challenged with SMI.

That's why Magellan Health Services of Arizona — the Regional Behavioral Health Authority for central Arizona—and the Arizona Department of Health Services/Division of Behavioral Health joined forces to create a community collaborative to reduce the rate of suicide among people in Central Arizona's behavioral health system.

The collaborative included service providers, suicide-attempt survivors, advocacy groups, legislators, police, and other community partners. Leaders from these organizations formed a steering committee and workgroups focused on:

- Suicide intervention and prevention training for all agency staff
- Suicide-attempt survivor support groups
- Family supports as a primary intervention
- Standardized approaches to clinical care and intervention
- Culturally appropriate ways to engage individuals.

The Arizona Programmatic Suicide Deterrent System has achieved many positive outcomes since its inception:

- More than 3,200 behavioral health care workers have taken the best-practice Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) and now have the confidence and skills to intervene with members who mention suicide.
- Support groups for suicide-attempt survivors were launched. These groups give participants the support to manage situations when suicidal thoughts occur and to aid them in their recovery.
- Family Engagement training for service providers was developed in partnership with the National Alliance on Mental Illness. This training is now part of employee orientation for all new behavioral health workers.
- A "culture card" was created for behavioral health care workers to provide myths and facts, strengths, challenges, communication styles, and etiquette when serving people who are Asian American, African American, Hispanic/Latino and Native American.
- A clinical care and intervention model was developed collaboratively among providers serving adults and children. It focuses on screening, assessment, and risk stratification for members and best practices for intervention.

We've seen a 41.5 percent reduction in the suicide rate among those with serious mental illnesses and a 50 percent reduction for the entire behavioral health system. As we continue to improve the program, we'll keep our sights set on driving suicides to zero.

Learn more about the program by attending a free webinar on Wednesday, Sept. 10; visit www.MagellanofAZ.com/suicide to register.

Dr. Karen Corallo Chaney, M.D. is the Adult Services Medical Director for Magellan Health Services of Arizona.

Read more: http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/opinion/columnists/article_de597bca-1753-11e3-95c7-0019bb2963f4.html