Staff Workshop 1

Understanding Suicide Prevention in Senior Living Communities
What we will learn

The problem of suicide among residents of senior living communities

• How to recognize the warning signs of suicide
• What to do if we think a resident is showing the signs
• How we can promote emotional health of all of our residents
Coping with the issue of suicide

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255). 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

• Employee Assistance Program
• Clergy
• Social Worker
• Community Mental Health Center
Suicidal behavior includes:

- Suicide
- Suicide attempts
- Passive or indirect suicide
Suicide among older adults in the United States

Suicide rates increase with age

- More than 5,000 older adults die by suicide every year
- 80% of these suicides are white men

Older adults die more often in a suicide attempt

Young people
100 to 200 attempts: 1 death

Older adults
4 attempts: 1 death

Suicide and suicide attempts in senior living communities

- Little is known
- Residents may have many risk factors for suicide
- Common means: jumping from building, hanging, cutting, and overdoses
Mrs. Smith
Mr. Jones
Two Questions:

1. Could we have known that Mrs. Smith and Mr. Jones would attempt suicide?

2. Can we do anything to prevent other suicides and suicide attempts?
Mrs. Smith’s warning signs

Something seemed out of place…
Mr. Jones’ Warning Signs
Warning signs of immediate risk of suicide

Someone…

• Threatening or talking about wanting to kill or hurt him/herself
• Looking for ways to kill him/herself
• Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide, when this is out of the ordinary for the person
Someone threatening to hurt him/herself, or talking about wanting to hurt or kill him/herself may say:

- “I’m going to kill myself.”
- “I’m going to end it all.”
- “I just want to die.”
Someone looking for ways to kill him/herself may:

- Stockpile pills
- Obtain a gun
- Steal a knife
- Refuse food or medicine
Someone talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide may say:

- “Death would solve all my problems.”
- “I wish I were dead.”
Take immediate action if you notice these warning signs

• Threatening or talking about wanting to kill or hurt him/herself
• Looking for ways to kill him/herself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means
• Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide, when this is out of the ordinary for the person
If you see any immediate warning signs:

- Do not leave the resident alone
- Call 911 OR Contact _______ [in this facility]
- Call resident’s emergency contact
Other warning signs

• Hopelessness
• Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge
• Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking
• Feeling trapped - like there’s no way out
• Increased alcohol or drug use
Other warning signs (cont.)

• Withdrawing from friends, family, or society
• Anxiety, agitation, unable to sleep or sleeping all the time
• Dramatic changes in mood
• No reason for living; no sense of purpose in life
If you see any of these less immediate warning signs:

• Contact _________ [mental health provider]
• Other: ____________________
Helping each other recognize and respond to the warning signs

Two volunteers needed
What to do in the event of a suicide death or attempt: [Example]

• Call 911
• _____ [Staff / Department] notifies resident's family
• _____ [Staff/ Department] assists other residents, family, and staff
• _____ [Staff/ Department] notifies regulatory authority
What to do after a suicide crisis

- Take care of yourself
- Take care of other residents and staff members
- Take care of residents’ families
Mrs. Smith and Mr. Jones
Mrs. Smith

- Suffered from depression
- Didn’t leave her room
Mr. Jones

• Recently moved to the senior living community
• Wife died
• Stopped socializing
• Did not participate in activities
• Argued with son about money
• Was drinking heavily
Depression

• Depression can contribute to suicide risk.
• We can help residents who are depressed.
• If you think a resident is depressed, you should tell [staff title].
Substance abuse

• Alcohol
• Prescription and over-the-counter medication
• If you think a resident has a substance abuse problem, you should tell [staff title].
Reducing Suicide Risk

Volunteers needed
Helping Mrs. Williams

Activities help Mrs. Williams:

• Make friends and connections
• Feel good about herself and her life
• Have a sense of purpose
Helping ALL residents

Positive activities help reduce suicide risk among all residents
Reduce suicide risk through connections

• Family and friends
• Staff
• The community
Reduce suicide risk through a positive outlook and a sense of meaning in life
Reduce suicide risk with a positive physical environment

• Pleasant and homelike
• Promotes social connections
Some things to remember:

• Take action if you notice warning signs.
• Depression and suicide are not a normal part of aging.
• There are things we can do every day to help the residents be happier and healthier.
Thank-you!