

10th September, 2005

World Suicide Prevention Day

"Prevention of suicide is everybody's business"

IASP

AN INITIATIVE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION (IASP)
CO-SPONSORED BY THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)



Once again, after an unprecedentedly successful public awareness campaign last year focussing on suicide prevention, the World Suicide Prevention Day will be held on **September 10, 2005**. Despite the complexity and severity of the problem, suicide prevention cannot be seen as the responsibility of experts alone; rather, preventing suicide is everyone's business. This year the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP), in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO), invites the public, communities, societies, individuals, professionals and volunteers to conduct activities on this day to promote and demonstrate our joint responsibility to save lives that would otherwise be lost to suicide.

THE PROBLEM OF SUICIDE

Suicide is one of the world's largest public health problems, accounting for approximately 1 million lives lost annually. One of the leading causes of death worldwide, particularly in younger people (WHO 2003), it profoundly affects individuals, families, workplaces, neighbourhoods and societies. The economic costs associated with suicide and self-inflicted injuries are estimated to be in the billions of dollars.

One million suicides represents:

- more lives lost than in all wars and homicides worldwide every year

- three times the catastrophic loss of human lives in the tragic Tsunami disaster in South East Asia at the end of last year
- a number equal to the loss in lives in the terrorist attack on New York 9.11.2001 – every day of the year.

One suicide represents:

- a lost life, lost talents, lost creativity, lost contributions made to society
- a lost son or daughter, a lost father or mother, a lost friend or colleague
- a wound that does not easily heal in those who are left behind.

THE NEED FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION INITIATIVES

Fortunately, suicide is not an inevitable burden that must be accepted by society. There are many ways in which suicide can be prevented. There is a great need for effective, coordinated and comprehensive suicide preventive initiatives throughout the world if we are to reduce the enormous numbers of completed suicides, suicide attempts and problems related to suicide and self-destructive behaviours.

Effective suicide prevention calls for an innovative, comprehensive multisectorial approach, including both health and non-health sectors, including education, labour, police, justice, religion, law, politics and the media.

IS SUICIDE PREVENTION A RESPONSIBILITY ONLY OF EXPERTS ?

Suicide is related to a complex interaction of causal factors, including mental illness, poverty, substance abuse, social isolation, losses, relational difficulties and workplace problems.

We certainly need experts, such as medical personnel and mental health workers, when combatting suicide. These professionals play crucial roles in risk assessment, emergency services and in providing short- and long-term treatments. They are also important in the development of our knowledge-base through research and evaluation of suicide preventive measures.

However, suicide cannot, be effectively prevented through the efforts of these experts alone. All of us should be part of the solution.

WHO CAN HELP ?

Everyone can do something to help reduce the number of people who try to solve their problems with suicidal behaviours. Since suicide is caused by an interaction of so many different factors, it can be combatted in many different ways. There is a need for each and every one of us to share this responsibility: suicide prevention is everybody's business. So what can you do?

HELP INCREASE AWARENESS OF SUICIDE AS A MAJOR PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM

An obstacle to effective suicide prevention is the strong societal and moral taboos and myths surrounding suicide and suicide survivors. Taboos prevent us from speaking openly and freely about the problem and discussing what to do. Myths often portray suicidal people as insane, suicide attempters as manipulating, and suicide as something inevitable. Myths create dysfunctional attitudes and are major obstacles to change. There is a great need to change public attitudes and increase awareness of suicide as a major public health problem that is largely preventable. We recommend that on the World Suicide Prevention Day 2005 individuals, groups, organisations and societies:

- Organise stands, walks, contests, luncheons, BBQs or open houses
- Organise exhibitions, fairs, concerts, cultural or spiritual events
- Organise open meetings, panel debates
- Hold press conferences
- Design and distribute leaflets, posters and other written information
- Contact local politicians
- Write letters to newspaper editors and contact reporters

... and any other efforts to put suicide prevention on the local public agenda. Use your imagination and creativity! Visit www.iasp.info for ideas!

FUND RAISING

Not all suicide prevention activities cost money; to lend a helping hand, to be a good friend or colleague does not necessarily imply financial costs. But many suicide preventive initiatives do. Therefore, you may want to use the World Suicide Prevention Day 2005 to raise funds for important projects.

We would encourage you to link your fund raising activities to the public awareness activities listed above. The International Association for Suicide Prevention is also grateful for any financial contribution, large and small, to fund our work promoting the WSPD internationally in years to come. Contributions may be sent to

*International Association for Suicide Prevention
Account Number 444-7271
Northern Trust Company
50 South LaSalle Street
Chicago Illinois 60675
USA*

FIRST AID IN SUICIDAL CRISES

Most people can benefit from more knowledge on how to recognize suicide risk and provide first aid in suicidal crises. This information may make us more confident and effective in encountering people at risk of suicide.

Thus, one important activity for the World Suicide Prevention Day would be to organise and offer brief courses in first aid in suicidal crises. This could be done in many ways, but should

involve people that can provide simple and effective teaching at low cost.

We encourage all individuals, institutions, organizations, professionals and volunteers who are able to conduct such courses, to consider organizing and promoting first aid educational activities for WSPD 2005.

LAUNCH NEW SUICIDE PREVENTIVE INITIATIVES, METHODS OR RESOURCES

Volunteers and professionals may find it useful to organise kick off events for new suicide preventive initiatives, strategies, methods or resources on WSPD 2005. Our experience is that such new initiatives get far more public attention when launched this way and they will also help increase the total impact of WSPD. Examples of activities to launch include:

- Suicide preventive strategies and plans
- Crisis intervention or support centres and hot lines
- Resource centres
- Films, Internet resources
- Training courses
- Books
- Research results
- Conferences

YOUR ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES MAY INSPIRE OTHERS

The **IASP** web site will present examples of activities to be held on September 10, 2005 (www.iasp.info).

We ask you to send us a brief description of the activities you are planning to hold for the 2005 World Suicide Prevention Day by filling out the form on the IASP web site, including

providing us with links to local and national sites where further information is available.

or by FAX to:
+47 22 92 39 58

You may also send information by mail to:
International Association for Suicide Prevention,
Suicide Research and Prevention Unit,
University of Oslo,
Sognsvannsveien 21, Bygg 12,
0320 Oslo, Norway.

We will post a selection of these activities from around the world on our web site along with a selection of links to sites where further information is available.

WHY SHOULD PREVENTION OF SUICIDE
BE EVERY BODY'S BUSINESS ?

We would like to answer this question citing the famous meditation of the 17th century English poet John Donne:

NO MAN IS AN ISLAND, ENTIRE OF ITSELF...
ANY MAN'S DEATH DIMINISHES ME, BECAUSE
I AM INVOLVED IN MANKIND; AND THEREFORE
NEVER SEND TO KNOW FOR WHOM THE BELL
TOLLS; IT TOLLS FOR THEE.

