

September 10 Is World Suicide Prevention Day

Suicide is a devastating result of mental illness. The statistics regarding suicide are staggering—it is the eleventh leading cause of death in the United States, accounting for 33,000 deaths in 2006¹. An estimated 12-25 suicide attempts occur for every suicide death.¹ The risk factors for suicide are varied, but more than 90% of completed suicides are people with a psychiatric disorder such as major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, substance abuse disorder, or schizophrenia.²

In a recent study, Alexander and colleagues examined 14 regional consumer-run Hope Dialogues in New York State. In the study, 198 participants were asked to identify five strategies they use to combat suicidal thoughts. Strategies included spirituality, talking to someone, positive thinking, using the mental health system, considering consequences of suicide to friends and family, peer support, and doing something pleasurable. Only 12% indicated they considered the mental health system a frontline strategy.³ This study reminds us that awareness of non-pharmacological and pharmacological treatment available to consumers who may be suicidal is an ongoing call to action.

September 10, 2009, has been designated World Suicide Prevention Day. Sponsored by the International Association for Suicide Prevention and the World Health Organization, events will take place around the world to raise awareness about suicide as an international problem and major health issue. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) is joining the efforts at the United Nations in New York City with presentations on suicide in different cultures and issues of suicide bereavement.

References

- 1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting Systems (WISQARS). www.cd.gov/ncipc/wisqars. Accessed September 7, 2009.
- 2 Moscicki EK. Identification of suicide risk factors using epidemiologic studies. *Psychiatr Clin North Am* 1997;20:499-517.
- 3 Alexander MJ, et al. Coping with thoughts of suicide: techniques used by consumers of mental health services. *Psychiatr Serv* 2009;60:1214-1221.