PSYCHIATRIC PHARMACISTS PLAY IMPORTANT ROLE IN SUICIDE RISK MITIGATION

SUICIDE: A GLOBAL PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN

Suicide is a global public health concern and a priority of the World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.[1,2] It has a devastating impact on communities and families. Prevention requires multi-sectoral, evidence-based, comprehensive,and timely interventions. Psychiatric pharmacists implement suicide risk mitigation interventions and are a key part of suicide prevention strategies.



PSYCHIATRIC PHARMACISTS HAVE A ROLE IN SUICIDE RISK MITIGATION AND PREVENTION

A variety of biological, psychological, and social factors contribute to suicide risk. Prevention requires multi-pronged approaches and actions that can be taken at all societal levels.[2] Within health care settings, psychiatric pharmacists:

- **Conduct evidence-based screenings to identify suicide risk**
- **Address access to lethal means**
- **Improve access and delivery of mental health care**

2022 U.S. STATISTICS ON SUICIDE[3]

49,000
Nearly 49,000 deaths by suicide

11th
Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death

11 Minutes
1 death by suicide occurs every 11 minutes

1,600,000
1,600,000 reported suicide attempts

55%
Firearms accounted for nearly 55% of suicide deaths

HEALTH DISPARITY[4]

57%
The adjusted suicide rate for Veterans is 57% greater than non-veterans

5X
Lesbian, gay, or bisexual youth attempt suicide at a rate 5x higher than heterosexual peers

9th
Suicide is the 9th leading cause of death among American Indian and Alaska Native people

Suicide rates increase as population density decreases and areas become more rural

PSYCHIATRIC PHARMACISTS CONDUCT EVIDENCE-BASED SCREENINGS TO IDENTIFY RISK AND ACT

Identifying where patients are on the suicide intent continuum, and which risk factors are present and most distressing, allows clinicians to employ evidence-based risk mitigation strategies.[6]

Cornerstones of Suicide Risk Mitigation[6]

- Collaborate with the patient on shared-decision making
- Leverage therapeutic relationship
- Extend empathy and compassion which fosters disclosure
- Assist patient in exploring and differentiating between wish to die and ending current pain
- Instill hope, resilience, and reasons for living

Psychiatric Pharmacists Monitor for Early Warning Signs such as...

- Communication of suicidal thoughts
- Seeking access to lethal means
- Non-adherence to prescribed medications
- Refilling medications earlier than recommended
- Changes in emotional presentation
- Treatment for new, serious diagnosis

Psychiatric Pharmacists Support Patients and Health Care Teams by...

- Identifying medications that may worsen depressive symptoms
- Educating patients about when they may start to see benefits from their psychotropic medications
- Recommending lower toxicity medication alternatives when clinically appropriate
- Offering resources for additional support such as 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

PSYCHIATRIC PHARMACISTS ADDRESS ACCESS TO LETHAL MEANS OF SUICIDE

Reducing access to lethal means is an empirically-based suicide prevention strategy. Lethal means safety includes any intervention that puts time and distance between a suicidal thought and ability to act on that thought. Psychiatric pharmacists limit lethal means by building strong therapeutic alliances with their patients and offering evidence-based interventions that reduce risk and save lives.[7]

Substance Use and Suicide Risk

Patients may be at risk for unintentional overdose when they have access to opioids or use illicit substances that may be contaminated with opioids.

DID YOU KNOW...
All 50 states and the District of Columbia have had mechanisms in place to allow pharmacists to dispense naloxone. Now, with over the counter availability, pharmacists will encourage greater distribution among communities, particularly in rural areas where need may be greater.[8]

IMPACT
When administered in time, naloxone reverses opioid overdoses (heroin, fentanyl, prescription opioids) and can prevent death

PSYCHIATRIC PHARMACIST INTERVENTION

- Assess which patients may be at risk for opioid overdose.
- Recommend or prescribe naloxone.
- Educate both patients and loved ones on benefits of naloxone.
- Educate on how to administer naloxone as a suicide prevention strategy.

Medication Access and Suicide Risk

Medication overdose is the most common method for suicide attempts.[9]

DID YOU KNOW...
Opioids are most commonly identified in fatal suicide poisonings, and benzodiazepines, barbiturates, antidepressants, antidiabetics, and calcium channel blockers also increase risk of fatality.[10] Poison control data reveals antidepressants, analgesics, and antihistamines amongst some of the most rapidly increasing substance categories resulting in more serious outcomes.[11]

IMPACT
Patients have access to medications that are medically necessary and others that pose greater concern are handled in a way which reduces risk.

PSYCHIATRIC PHARMACIST INTERVENTION

- Access state prescription drug monitoring programs to help identify patients who may be at risk for overdose.
- Work with patients and caregivers to ensure that fewer medications are readily available which may reduce severity and lethality of overdose attempts.
- Provide information on best storage practices including how to safely dispose of medications.
- Collaborate with other providers to recommend clinically appropriate alternatives to high risk medications.

Firearm Access and Suicide Risk

Nearly 55% of suicides in the U.S. are by firearm, and 90% of suicide attempts with a firearm are fatal.

DID YOU KNOW...
The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention reports that nationwide firearm owner education may prevent 9,500 deaths by 2025.[12]

IMPACT
Suicidal crisis and risk can escalate quickly; research indicates many people think about suicide for less than 10 minutes before engaging in suicidal behavior. Advance action to remove or reduce access to firearms can save lives.[2,7]

PSYCHIATRIC PHARMACIST INTERVENTION

- Provide education to patients on the importance of safe storage of firearms (locking, disassembling).
- Address environmental safety with patients and caregivers, especially when there are children/youth in the home who may be at risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors.[13]
- Recommend temporary removal of firearms from the home by the patient and/or caregiver during periods of high suicide risk.

PSYCHIATRIC PHARMACISTS IMPROVE ACCESS AND DELIVERY OF MENTAL HEALTH CARE REDUCING SUICIDE RISK

Timely access to mental health care is a fundamental need for those at risk of suicide. Through Doctoral level education, post-graduate residency training, board certifications, and suicide prevention training, psychiatric pharmacists are well-equipped to serve in direct patient care roles, and thereby increase access to mental health services across the continuum of health care.[14]

The need for mental health services will continue to grow over the next decade and psychiatric pharmacists are positioned to positively impact access to mental health care and medication-related outcomes.[14]

Psychiatric pharmacists have demonstrated a role in completing evidence-based suicide screening, risk assessments, and safety plans.[15]

Incorporating psychiatric pharmacists into primary care clinics can strengthen screening efforts and ensure engagement in evidence-based mental health care.[16]

The American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists (AAPP) is a professional association representing psychiatric pharmacists nationwide. Our members integrate into teams of health care professionals, making a difference in overall costs, treatment efficiencies, patient recovery, and quality of life.

References available at: https://aapp.org/advocacy/suicide

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