

VISN 2 Center of Excellence for Suicide Prevention

Overview

In August 2007, the Department of Veterans Affairs established a Center of Excellence (CoE) at Canandaigua, organized as a prevention and research center embracing the overreaching goal of reducing morbidity and mortality in the Veteran population associated with suicide. To this end, the Center's mission is to develop and study Veteran focused, evidenced based, public health approaches to suicide prevention. A public health approach is defined as a series of integrated measures designed to prevent disease, promote health and prolong life among members of an entire population. Rather than focusing on individual characteristics or specific disease, public health considers individuals within their environments and seeks to identify total system approaches to providing access to care and promoting conditions that support health and well-being. The CoE at Canandaigua seeks to meet this mission through serving as a national, regional and local resource on suicide research and prevention and mental health through three main key Cores: the Epidemiology and Population Health Core, Clinical Interventions Core, and the Education, Training and Dissemination Core. The CoE also supports implementation research, data management and analytic support for several of VA's national initiatives, including VA's Veterans Crisis Line and Suicide Prevention Coordinator Program. Taken together, the CoE's activities constitute a public health approach to suicide prevention, through: (1) conducting research to acquire a better understanding of the characteristics and contexts of suicide and attempted suicide among Veterans, especially during periods of transition; (2) Conducting studies to examine the impact of broadly based, national VA suicide prevention initiatives targeting early identification of Veterans at risk for suicide; (3) assessing and disseminating evidence based/best clinical practices for reducing the morbidity and mortality due to Veteran suicidal behaviors; and (4) engaging with community partners to identify Veterans outside VA's healthcare system who are at risk for suicide. The COE at Canandaigua is comprised of an interdisciplinary team, representing the diverse fields of psychology, psychiatry, epidemiology, health communication, sociology, anthropology, nursing, and social work. The offices are located at the VAMC in Canandaigua, New York, just outside of Rochester, New York.

Mission

The Center's mission is to serve as a national, regional, and local resource on suicide prevention and mental health through the development and close integration of three Cores: Epidemiology and Population Health, Clinical Interventions Core, and Education, Training and Dissemination. Through this infrastructure, the COE is addressing the problem of suicide in Veterans across a wide continuum of levels of risk through: (1) conducting research to provide a better understanding of suicide and attempted suicide in Veterans through the acquisition and analyses of morbidity and mortality data bases; (2) evaluating the impact of implementation of National VA suicide prevention initiatives on reducing events of suicidal behaviors with a primary focus on VA's 24/7 Veterans Crisis Line, including VA's related public awareness campaigns; (3) development, implementation, evaluation and dissemination of evidence based/best practices for reducing the morbidity and mortality due to Veteran suicides; and (4) engaging with community partners to identify Veterans outside VA's healthcare system who are at high risk for suicide.

Center of Excellence Leadership

Director: Kenneth Conner, PsyD, MPH

Chief, Epidemiology and Population Health Core: Robert Bossarte, Ph.D.

Chief, Education, Training and Dissemination Core: Deborah King, PhD

Chief, Clinical Interventions Core: Wil Pigeon, PhD
Administrative Officer: Lisa Lochner

Epidemiology and Population Health Core

The Epidemiology and Population Health Core seeks to acquire population level data and to utilize or modify existing secondary data sets to allow improved estimation of rates of attempted suicide and suicide and improve understanding of the characteristics and contexts of risk. This includes studies of Veterans who are utilizers of VA healthcare and those who are not. In addition, this core houses studies on national VA initiatives, which include investigation of the effectiveness of public awareness campaigns to promote the suicide hotline and early help-seeking behaviors.

Clinical Interventions Core

Informed by epidemiologic work and by the Center's mission, the CoE has identified both key populations and settings for the conduct of its research and focused prevention efforts. Recent target populations have included sexual and gender minorities, Veterans experiencing moral injury, Veterans displaying warning signs for suicide, and those with sleep disorders. Newly identified populations include women Veterans and Veterans not in VHA care. The center also collaborates with VHA Primary Care settings and the National Veterans Crisis Line (VCL), among other settings, for its research. The Clinical Research Core seeks to shape the development of interventions that can be widely used in suicide prevention. Consistent with a public health approach, we are seeking to reach large groups of Veterans and their families who may not come to clinical attention. Moreover, when we develop and conduct research on individual-level interventions, we prioritize delivering them outside of traditional mental health settings including in primary care, emergency departments, during visits to Veterans' homes, and by telephone.

Education, Training and Dissemination Core

The Education, Training and Dissemination Core has two primary aims. Consistent with the overall vision of the CoE, the Core seeks to enhance the translation of leading-edge suicide prevention findings into clinical practice by disseminating evidence-based strategies and best practices. This occurs through a variety of learning modalities including, but not limited to, face-to-face education programs, innovative web-based trainings, and webinars. As well, the Core aims to prepare the next generation of leaders and innovators in suicide prevention research, education and clinical care via the VA Advanced Fellowship Program and additional collaborative training arrangements for graduate students at the University of Rochester Medical Center.

Academic Affiliate

University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry; Department of Psychiatry

Contact

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