



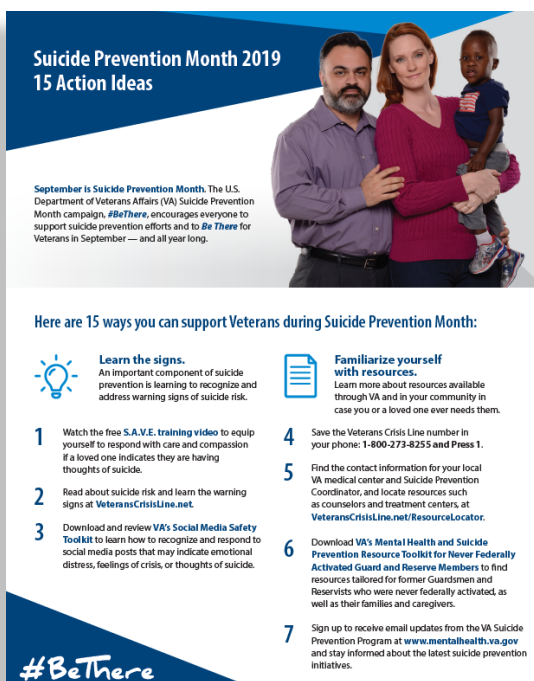
## FROM THE DIRECTOR

As many of you know, September is Suicide Prevention Month. This year, the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) suicide prevention campaign theme is **#BeThere**. Following the very successful joint VA/DoD Suicide Prevention Conference in Nashville at the end of August, the Center of Excellence for Suicide Prevention (CoE) is distributing this newsletter to raise awareness about Veteran suicide and to disseminate the efforts we undertake every day to address this complex public health problem.

Established in August 2007, the CoE's overarching mission is to "prevent morbidity and mortality from suicidal behaviors among all Veterans by using a public health approach." Since its inception, the CoE has been guided by a public health approach that was later adopted and embraced as the model for the VA's National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide: 2018-2028, underscoring the CoE's role as a national resource.

This month's newsletter highlights recent CoE activities and includes ways in which you can promote Suicide Prevention Month in your communities. Thank you for your continued dedication to Veterans. Preventing Veteran suicide is a task we must continue to undertake together.

- Wilfred R. Pigeon, Ph.D.



**Suicide Prevention Month 2019  
15 Action Ideas**

September is Suicide Prevention Month. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Suicide Prevention Month campaign, **#BeThere**, encourages everyone to support suicide prevention efforts and to **Be There** for Veterans in September — and all year long.

Here are 15 ways you can support Veterans during Suicide Prevention Month:

- Learn the signs.** An important component of suicide prevention is learning to recognize and address warning signs of suicide risk.
- 1** Watch the free S.A.V.E. training video to equip yourself to respond with care and compassion if a loved one indicates they are having thoughts of suicide.
- 2** Read about suicide risk and learn the warning signs at [VeteransCrisisLine.net](http://VeteransCrisisLine.net).
- 3** Download and review VA's Social Media Safety Toolkit to learn how to recognize and respond to social media posts that may indicate emotional distress, feelings of crisis, or thoughts of suicide.
- 4** Save the Veterans Crisis Line number in your phone: 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1.
- 5** Find the contact information for your local VA medical center and Suicide Prevention Coordinator, and locate resources such as counselors and treatment centers, at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator](http://VeteransCrisisLine.net/ResourceLocator).
- 6** Download VA's Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Resource Toolkit for Never Federally Activated Guard and Reserve Members to find resources tailored for former Guardsmen and Reservists who were never federally activated, as well as their families and caregivers.
- 7** Sign up to receive email updates from the VA Suicide Prevention Program at [www.mentalhealth.va.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov) and stay informed about the latest suicide prevention initiatives.

**#BeThere**

## SPM 2019 Resources

- VeteransCrisisLine.net offers great resources for recognizing the warning signs of a Veteran at risk as well as ways for a Veteran to speak confidentially 24/7 to a qualified responder.
- For Veterans in crisis, the simple act of starting a conversation can be the support they need to begin a journey toward feeling like themselves again. The resources on this website can help you learn simple, encouraging ways to show your support to a Veteran you are concerned about, tips for speaking with a Veteran in need, and questions you can ask to keep the conversation going. StartTheConversation today.
- Now is a great time to complete S.A.V.E. training. Learn how to **#BeThere** for Veterans this month and every month.
- To promote awareness, VA employees are encouraged to use the social media and website resources available in the Suicide Prevention Month 2019 group on the VA Pulse.

## Does Marijuana Use Increase the Risk of Suicide?

A recently published article in *Depression & Anxiety* submitted by CoE researchers Lee Ashrafioun Ph.D., Tracy Stecker Ph.D. and colleagues, examines the unique and interactive effects of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and days using alcohol, opioids and marijuana on PTSD symptoms, suicidal ideation and suicidal behavior up to one year later in a high-risk sample of military personnel not active in mental health treatment. Learn more about their findings.

## The CoE Heads South!

Several CoE team members traveled to Nashville at the end of August for the 2019 VA/DoD Suicide Prevention Conference. Since its inception in 2004, this conference has been an important forum for sharing best practices, key research findings and policy updates in the suicide prevention field.

Nine Center personnel presented at this year's conference on topics including safe firearm storage, sleep, surveillance data and strategies for Veteran messaging.



## Veterans Integration to Academic Leadership (VITAL)

Housed here at the CoE, the VITAL program provides mental health & supportive services to student Veterans on college campuses. Check out their latest video!



## Have You Heard? Our Website is Revamped!

The CoE website has recently gotten a makeover. Now, more than ever, our site offers the ability to gain greater insight into our four divisions: Data & Analytics, Research, Education & Dissemination, and Center Operations.

Learn more about us, what we do and how we are striving to achieve our mission, to prevent morbidity and mortality from suicidal behaviors among all Veterans by using a public health approach.

[www.mirecc.va.gov/suicideprevention](http://www.mirecc.va.gov/suicideprevention)

## CoE SPOTLIGHT: MEET OUR NEW FELLOWS



**Shane T.W. Kuhlman, Ph.D.**

"My research focuses on the upstream study and prevention of suicide. Having recently completed my Clinical and Counseling Combined Integrated Psychology Ph.D. from the University of South Alabama, I have been the program director of two campus wide suicide prevention grants and have completed outpatient and inpatient clinical rotations in community-based Veteran and non-Veteran populations."

**Academics:** University of South Florida (B.A.); University of South Alabama (Doctor of Philosophy, Master of Science); University of Rochester Medical Center (Doctoral Internship)

**Aim of Fellowship:** "My goal while at the CoE is to continue with programmatic development by aiding in the evaluation and dissemination of VA-based suicide prevention programming. Specifically, my research program's aim is to better understand help-seeking and peer intervention, and how to facilitate these via public health programming."



**Katrina J. Speed, Ph.D.**

"As a clinical psychologist, my focus is presently centered on investigating (1) the influence of sleep disturbances, such as nightmares, on the development and course of suicidal thoughts and behaviors (STBs) and (2) the development, provision and assessment of quality sleep interventions to help mitigate the risk that poor sleep creates for STBs. I am especially interested in and passionate about working with Veterans, who are disproportionately affected by sleep disturbances and STBs."

**Academics:** Mississippi University for Women (B.A.); Mississippi State University (Master of Science, Doctoral Degree)

**Aim of Fellowship:** "I am using my post-doctoral fellowship experience to expand my research program to include investigation of the theoretical underpinnings of the sleep/suicide relationship and evaluation of treatment referral and consultation process."

**#BeThere**

**#SPM19**

Consider adding  
**#BeThere** | BeThereforVeterans.com  
and/or **#SPM19** | va.gov/BeThere  
to your email signature this September.

**#BeThere**