

MONTHLY REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR



Suicide is one of the greatest national public health issues of our time, impacting people from all walks of life regardless of whether they served in the military. In 2016, suicide was the 10th leading cause of death across all ages claiming the lives of nearly 45,000 Americans, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). As we are all aware, it is also estimated that we lose 20 Veterans to suicide each day in the U.S.

Suicide Prevention is a top priority for the Department of Veterans Affairs and for us here at Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center. We believe any Veteran lost to suicide is a tragedy, and we are working diligently with a comprehensive public health approach to ensure our Veterans are safe and healthy. Our evidence-based strategies include:

- Screening every Veteran at each appointment for suicide risk
- Mental Health professionals immediately available if a risk is detected
- Coordinated care across all services for suicide prevention, particularly Primary Care and Mental Health
- Comprehensive Mental Health and Tele-Mental Health care for Veterans near and far
- Ongoing training and community partnerships to spread suicide prevention training across such areas as law enforcement, faith-based organizations, and Veteran service organizations

The good news is we are making progress in preventing suicide. Of the 20 Veterans who commit suicide each day in the U.S., six of them receive VA care. And while we are thankful that our efforts are working for many who choose VA for their health care, this fact points out the urgent need to bring Veterans to VA even more. The reality is the best time to help prevent suicide is before Veterans are in crisis, so if they come to us for routine care we have an even greater opportunity to recognize any risk factors and provide the care

they need before they ever reach the point of considering or attempting self-harm.

We need your help. If you know a Veteran who has not chosen to seek care at VA – whether for Primary Care, specific health issues or mental health – encourage them to do so. They can enroll online at www.va.gov or come to any of our VA facilities to enroll for care.

Know the risk factors for possible suicidal behaviors. Some risk factors include:

- A prior suicide attempt
- Mental health conditions
- Stressful life events such as divorce, job loss, or the death of a loved one
- Availability of lethal means
- Thinking about hurting or killing oneself or talking about death, dying, or suicide
- Looking for ways to kill or harm oneself
- Self-destructive behavior, such as drug abuse or the dangerous use of weapons

Most importantly, if you know a Veteran you are concerned about or who is in crisis, get them to the nearest safe place or call for help immediately. The Veterans Crisis Line, 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1 is available 24/7 for Veterans or you can call yourself. The VA team is also available 24/7 for online chat at www.veteranscrisisline.net or you can text 838255.

Working together we can help our Veterans and prevent suicide. Simple acts of kindness, open conversations, and simply caring enough to be there go a long way. And when medical or mental health care is needed, our VA team is here and we want, more than anything, to make sure our Veterans are healthy, happy and safe. Thanks for partnering with us in this, our #1 priority.

Sincerely,

Scott R. Isaacks | Director & CEO



Scott R. Isaacks, FACHE
Medical Center Director

UPCOMING EVENTS

Go Red Heart Health Fair
Feb. 12, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.
VAMC Primary Care Auditorium

Red Cross Blood Drive
Feb. 20, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.
VAMC Main Auditorium

SUICIDE PREVENTION TAKES EVERYONE

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Text: 838255



Choose VA



VA

Ralph H. Johnson
VA Medical Center