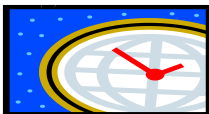


Conversations on Access to Lethal Means



*putting time & distance between
lethal means and a person at risk of suicide*

Elizabeth Makulec
MIMH Regional Suicide Prevention Conference
Thursday December 6, 2018

Before we begin



- Developed by Dr. Mark Ciocca and Elaine Frank
- CALM is a specific PART of Suicide Prevention
 - *Not THE answer but should always be included*
 - *Anyone can do it – not just professionals*
- Think safety when talking about suicide
- Take care of yourself too
- CALM is anti-suicide not anti-gun or anti-drugs

Why should we talk about suicide?

- Suicide is the **2nd leading cause of death** for those **10 – 34 years old** in the US. (Injuries are #1)
- The rate of suicide has been rising in the US
- Talking about suicide is one way to prevent it.
- EVERYONE can have a role in preventing deaths of despair

Suicide is **generally** preventable!

Reducing Access to Lethal Means for those at risk for suicide

IF: Make highly lethal means less accessible

THEN:

- a. Reduce suicide attempts - or
- b. Delay suicide attempt(s) - or
- c. Attempt suicide with less lethal means



But does it work?

YES!

Asia – Pesticides

USA – Automobile Exhaust

Britain – Coal to natural gas

Canada – 'Invisible Veil'

Israel – Military Initiative

Coming Soon – Golden Gate Bridge

Conversations on Access to Lethal Means are about

***encouraging time and distance
between a suicidal person
and access to highly lethal means
to POTENTIALLY save a life***

What are some Warning Signs?

- Depressed, angry, impulsive?
- Facing a break-up, legal trouble or other setback?
- Using drugs or alcohol more?
- Withdrawing from usual activities?
- Talking about being better off dead?
- Losing hope?
- Acting reckless?
- Feeling trapped?

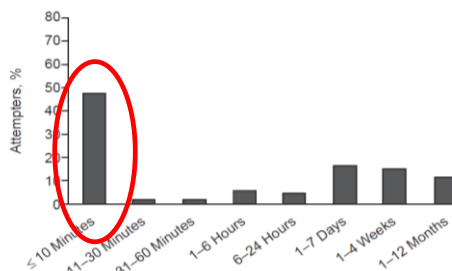
Why is CALM Effective?

- Most suicidal people are not sure whether they want to live or die (*ambivalence*)
- The actual act of suicide is often made very quickly - particularly among young people (*impulsivity*)
- Suicidal thoughts often come and go (*long term survival*)
- Suicide methods vary greatly in lethality



Quick Decision Time

Time Between 1st Thought of Suicide and Attempt



Deisenhammer et al., 2009

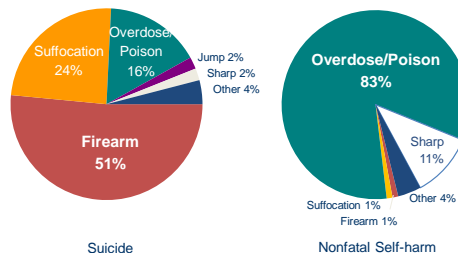
BUT IS IT TRULY A LIFE SAVED?

•What proportion of serious attempters eventually die by suicide?

75% 45% 25% 10%

Owens, 2002

Methods of Self-Harm, U.S.



Sources: Suicide: CDC WONDER (2013)
Inpatient: HCUP-NIS (2005)

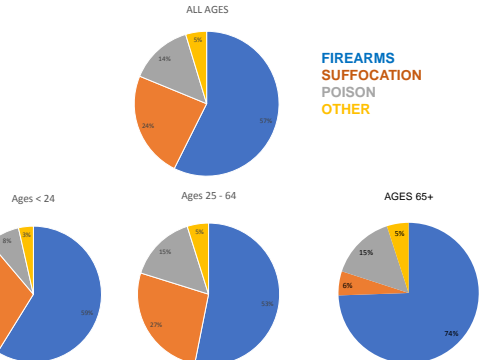
MeansMatter

Why focus on Firearms?

- * Frequency
- * Lethality
- * Decision Time
- * Availability
- * Cultural Acceptability



Suicide Methods – MISSOURI 2016



Firearm Availability As A Suicide 'Enabler'

- Suicide rates vary with rates of firearm ownership¹
- **82% of youth who die by suicide used a firearm owned by a family member, usually a parent²**
- Parents underestimate the likelihood that their children have or could obtain their firearms.



Who can benefit from Conversations on Access to Lethal Means?

- A. Anyone expressing suicidal thoughts?
- B. Someone who has only a vague suicide plan?
- C. Only someone with a specific suicide plan?
- D. Anyone struggling with depression and/or substance misuse, particularly with additional or **potential** stressors?

Conversations on Access to Lethal Means are about

***Putting time and distance
between a suicidal person
and highly lethal means
MAY save a life***

Parts of the Conversations

- Ask as directly as possible if they are suicidal
- Express your concern for their safety
- Ask about access to firearms and medications (*and other lethal means as indicated*)
- Tell them that reducing access **REDUCES** risk
- **Work together (and/or include others) to find a plan to keep them as safe as possible**
- **Don't leave them alone until you feel they are safe**

Key Questions to Reduce Access to Firearms

1. How long would it take for you to access a gun?

- ✓ Establishes potential timeline
- ✓ Helps determine immediacy of risk

2. What changes could reduce access to them?

- ✓ Shift thinking toward safety
- ✓ Consider no ammunition, safe storage, or separation
- ✓ Identifies possible other helpers

Next Steps

- Is there someone you trust to hold on to your firearms while you/your loved-one is at risk?
- What stands in the way for temporary removal?
- If these can't be resolved, decrease access with firearms in the home (*layers of prevention*)
- Make a specific plan and follow up

Options for Removing Guns from a Home

Temporary off-site storage of all guns is the **safest** option

- A friend or relative who is legally able to possess firearms
- \$ Storage facility
 - Fees depend on size of unit & whether climate-controlled
- \$ Some gun stores, shooting ranges, or gun clubs offer inexpensive storage options*
- \$ Pawn shops*
 - Police may be able to store them (or dispose if no longer wanted)*

*These options involve a formal transfer of the guns & may require a background check (NICS) to retrieve them.

If Temporary Removal is Unacceptable

Advise -

- Lock ALL guns unloaded in a **gun safe or lock box**
- **Remove ammunition** from the home or lock separately
- Guns already locked? **Change the combination or key location** in case the patient knows them
- **Locks** - trigger, cable, or clamshell –locks aren't as safe as a secure gun safe—but are better than not locking at all and offer an added layer of safety
- **Remove a key component** of the firearm like the firing pin



What about other methods?

**Putting time and distance
between a suicidal person and
ANY lethal means
MAY save a life**

Reducing Access to Medications

- Safely dispose of all out of date, unused and excess medications and over the counter remedies.
 - Do not flush/pour down sink
 - Deterra® Medicine Disposal - Drug-Deactivation Bags
- Reduce quantities of prescription and over the counter meds especially those for pain and other meds of abuse.
- At risk person should not control quantities of medication especially drugs of abuse
- Having to refill the pill box or prescription can provide an additional contact and check-in

...more Medication safety

- Use a lock box to secure lethal medications
- Use a lock box if necessary to store additional medications
- Involving a pharmacist or Poison Center can be helpful to determine “safe” levels

Suffocation/Hanging

- Almost impossible to remove all means
- Maintain physical and emotional contact
- Focus on other ways of increasing safety

Other Methods (e.g. sharps, bridges, etc) that the person talks about

- Reduce access wherever possible
- Maintain physical and emotional contact
- Focus on other ways of increasing safety

Reducing access to lethal means is only PART of suicide prevention

National Resources

- American Association of Suicidology
www.suicidology.org
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
www.afsp.org
- Means Matter, Harvard Injury Control Research Center
www.MeansMatter.org
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center
www.sprc.org
- SAMHSA's Resource Center to Promote Acceptance, Dignity and Social Inclusion Associated with Mental Health (ADS Center)
<http://promoteacceptance.samhsa.gov>

Thank you

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