

Interprofessional Suicide Prevention Education at the University of South Carolina: Using Pledge Drives to Train the Next Generation of Healthcare Providers

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Purpose

To raise awareness about suicide, its risk factors, and warning signs among health professions students and campus community members, by hosting an interprofessional suicide awareness event and pledge drive.

Background

- Suicide is the 10th-leading cause of death in South Carolina¹
 - In 2016, 818 people in South Carolina died by suicide¹
- Secondary schools and colleges may be particularly important venues for intervention
 - Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among 15- to 24-year-olds²
- Few opportunities exist for interprofessional groups of health professions students to be educated about and raise awareness of suicide prevention

Aims

1. Collect at least 700 pledges from community members in a 30-minute period
2. Provide an opportunity for students to work in interprofessional groups to engage with the community about a pressing public health concern
3. Determine the value of pledge drives to interprofessional health care education at the University of South Carolina

Methods

- USC IHI hosted a suicide awareness event and pledge drive in October 2015
- The pledge drive was inspired by the the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's 100 Million Healthier Lives campaign
- Health professions students were taught how to identify symptoms and at-risk individuals, as well as steps they can take to mitigate those risks

University of South Carolina IHI Open School Chapter Suicide Prevention Pledge

I **pledge** to raise awareness about **suicide prevention** by talking to my friends, family and social media on the topic and the resources available:

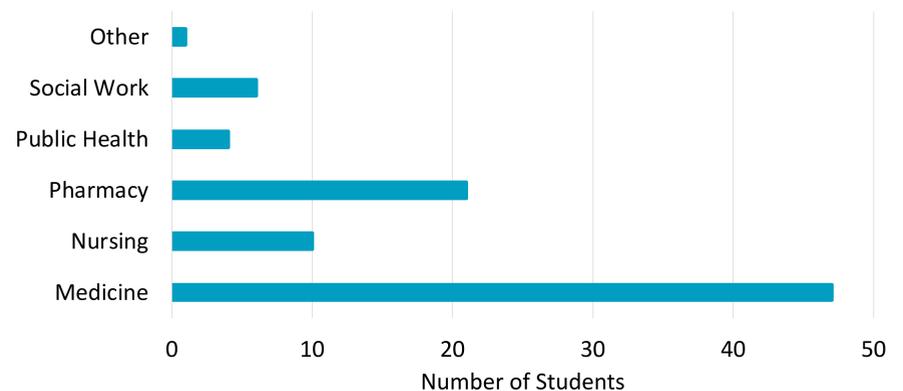
Visit AFSP.org for resources available and in an Emergency, contact:
The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: **1-800-273-8255**
(if Veteran or Family member Press Option 1)
Hospital Emergency Department, Urgent Care Center or Clinic
Call 911

- Groups of four students collected pledges from other members of the USC community in 30 minutes
 - Pledges vowed to raise awareness about suicide prevention by talking to one person about the topic and share the resources provided, including the National Suicide Prevention Hotline and local clinics
 - Pledges were asked to share their pledge on social media using provided hashtags
- Student participants were surveyed for feedback in the week following the event

Results

89 student participants collected more than 800 pledges in 30 minutes, exceeding the goal of 700 pledges (Figure 2)

Figure 2. Student Participation by School, n=89



General student feedback:

The pledging part went surprisingly well, and everyone we approached was willing to stop and talk.

The topic was well presented and asking for pledges was an active way of spreading the word about suicide prevention.

Having students go out and physically do something was good. It engaged everyone and made the time more memorable by being interactive.

What students thought worked well:

Sending us out in groups to talk to real people - there's no better practice than that.

The information section presenting all of the risk factors and the groups most at-risk for suicide.

Conclusions and Future Directions

- Interprofessional education about suicide prevention is rare among health professions students, yet they are expected to work as an effective part of a healthcare team and communicate comfortably about mental health issues upon graduation
- The opportunity to work in collaborative teams and practice discussing sensitive topics made this pledge drive unique and worthwhile for participants
- Pledge drives open channels for communication and, when necessary, intervention
- Pledge drives create the chance for exponential message growth and may make a positive difference for students with mental health issues
- Future opportunities for interprofessional education through pledge drives include raising awareness of depression and substance abuse

References

1. South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. (n.d.). Death Statistics for Residents of South Carolina: Cause of Death: Suicide (Intentional self-harm). Retrieved January 9, 2018, from <http://scangis.dhesc.sc.gov/scan/bdip/tables/death2table.aspx>
2. South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. (2017, October). South Carolina Mortality and Morbidity Statistics 2016. Retrieved January 9, 2018, from <http://www.scdhec.gov/Health/docs/BiostatisticsPubs/VMS2016.pdf>

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