SUICIDE PREVENTION WITHIN THE ATHLETIC COMMUNITY

JONATHAN POHL
RACHAEL MEARMAN

PRESENTER CONFLICT

• THE VIEWS PRESENTED TODAY ARE MINE, EXCEPT WHERE CITED
• MY VIEWS MAY NOT BE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE VIEWS OF CENTRAL CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY OR MY COLLEAGUES
• PARTICIPANTS MUST USE DISCRETION WHEN USING INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THIS PRESENTATION.

ADJUSTMENT TO COLLEGE

• TRANSITION TO COLLEGE IS CHALLENGING
  • DECREASED PARENTAL SUPERVISION
  • MORE INDEPENDENT WITH MORE RESPONSIBILITY
  • HAVING MORE "NEW" TASKS TO COMPLETE
  • NEW ENVIRONMENT
  • EXPANDED SOCIAL NETWORK
• IN A STUDY BY DRUM, LADDA, GEARY AND FITZPATRICK (2014)
  • ATHLETES ADJUSTED BETTER TO COLLEGE THAN NON-ATHLETES
RISK FACTORS

- Prior suicide attempt(s)
- Misuse and abuse of alcohol or other drugs
- Mental disorders, particularly depression and other mood disorders
- Access to lethal means
- Knowing someone who died by suicide, particularly a family member
- Social isolation
- Chronic disease and disability (recent injury)
- Lack of access to behavioral health care

WWW.SPRC.ORG
(SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCE CENTER)

DEPRESSION AND ALCOHOL

- In a study by Dvorak, Lamis, and Malone (2013)
  - High levels of alcohol use and depressive symptoms increase suicide proneness
  - Depressive symptoms, urgency, and alcohol use, especially heavy use increase suicide proneness

ANXIETY

- Excessive worry
- Hopelessness, helplessness
- Changes in sleep and appetite
- A sense of foreboding
- Restlessness, purposeless energy
- Interference with work, school, relationships
- Interference with concentration and memory
- Feeling exhausted
DEPRESSION

- Burdensomeness
- Social Isolation
- Hopelessness, Helplessness
- Changes in Sleep and Appetite
- Focused on the Negative – A Sense of Foreboding
- Little If Any Energy
- No Pleasure in Once Pleasurable Activities
- Interferes with Work, School, Relationships
- Difficulty with Concentration and Memory

SUICIDE EXPOSURE

- In a study on suicide exposure, awareness and attitudes in college students, Cebel, Bulin, and Moore (2013) found:
  - 65% of their participants knew at least one person who attempted and/or died by suicide
  - More than 1 in 5 students identified as a “suicide survivor”
  - 85% of students believed that suicide is preventable
- Leading the authors to suggest training to increase student efficacy in referring peers.

WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE

- Hopelessness
- Someone threatening to hurt or kill themselves
- Someone looking for ways to kill themselves, seeking access to pills, weapons, or other means
- Someone talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide
- Rage, Anger, Seeking Revenge
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking
- Feeling trapped—like there’s no way out
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE

- Withdrawing from friends, family, or society
- Anxiety, agitation, unable to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Dramatic mood changes
- No reason for living, no sense of purpose in life

WWW.PREVENTSUICIDE.CT.ORG

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- Effective behavioral health care
- Connectedness to individuals, family, community, and social institutions
- Life skills (including problem solving skills and coping skills, ability to adapt to change)
- Self-esteem and a sense of purpose or meaning in life
- Cultural, religious, or personal beliefs that discourage suicide

WWW.SPRC.ORG
(SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCE CENTER)
SCREENING ATHLETES

• CURRENTLY SCREEN FOR HEALTH RELATED CONCERNS
• NEED TO SCREEN FOR ANXIETY/DEPRESSION
• PHQ-9 AND GAD-7 CAN BE USED
• COMMUNITY CULTURE OF "CHECKING IN" WITH ONE ANOTHER

• RAO AND HONG UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE IN COLLEGE ATHLETES: EMERGING CONCEPTS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS 2015

ASK THE QUESTION

BARRIERS TO PROFESSIONAL HELP

• IN A STUDY OF STUDENTS BY CZYZ, HORWITZ, EISENBORG, KRAMER, AND KING (2013)
• OVER 1/3 SCORED IN THE MODERATE TO SEVERE DEPRESSION RANGE ON PHQ-9
• 30% REPORTED LIFETIME HISTORY OF A SUICIDE ATTEMPT
• 66% BELIEVE THEIR PROBLEMS WERE MINOR OR TRANSIENT IN NATURE
• 26.8% REPORTED A LACK OF TIME
WHO DO STUDENTS TURN TO FOR HELP?

- Students will seek out 3-4 people prior to getting help.
- Many athletes will seek out a coach, trainer, academic advisor, and/or teammate before seeing a mental health professional.
- Athletics involves teams, QPR is another team working together for success.

QPR

- Suicide prevention gatekeeper training
- Question, Persuade, Refer – Dr. Paul Quinnett
- 90 minute training
- Provides information on signs and symptoms of a potentially suicidal person
- Provides techniques in asking the suicide question
- How to persuade the person to get help
- Making a referral within your community

CREATING A SAFETY NETWORK

- Who to train:
  - Everyone who has contacts with students in any way
- How to train:
  - In teams, everyone can be there
  - During staff and faculty meetings
- When to train:
  - Athletes during off-season
  - Coaches, trainers, academic support – late May, early June
- Why train:
  - Even the loss of one life is too many