



Area suicide rates cause for concern, but help is available

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I find it refreshing to see headlines that are a positive reflection on our community.

Other headlines, such as this one from USA Today in 2007, "Suicide Leaves Indiana County Mourning and Mystified," call on our community to take action.

In coming weeks you will see more information about suicide — the 2009 Vanderburgh County suicides rates are expected to be released on Wednesday.

In 1998, Dr. David Satcher, then the U.S. Surgeon General, called suicide "a national health problem." Today, 12 years later, suicide is not only a national, but a local concern.

In 2007, Vanderburgh County experienced 40 deaths by suicide — the largest number in recent years. In 2008, the number declined to 38.

Unfortunately, with the state of our economy and other factors in 2009, the suicide rate is expected to have increased.

Unless action is taken immediately, this trend could continue. As a reader, you may be asking, "What can I do to help combat this local epidemic?"

First you must understand the facts about suicide:

- More than 90 percent of all people who die by suicide are suffering a psychiatric illness.
- Firearms are used in 6 of every 10 suicides.
- Suicide rates are highest among Americans 45-54 years old.
- In the month before their suicide, 75 percent of elderly persons had a visit with a physician.
- Males are four times more likely to

die by suicide than females.

- Over half of all suicides in America occur in adult men aged 25-55, and most of these men are employed.
- More teenagers and young adults die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza and chronic lung disease combined.

According to the Surgeon General, an average of 89 suicides occur each day in the U.S. This equates to one suicide every 17 minutes. Of these suicides, 4,316 are people between the ages of 15-24 years old. The rate among this group: one suicide every two hours.

Suicide has become the 11th ranking cause of death among Americans. Homicide is the 15th leading cause of death.

In an effort to increase awareness and educate the community, a Southwestern Indiana Suicide Prevention Coalition was formed by local mental health organizations, hospitals, universities, youth service agencies and the coroner's office.

This coalition has assisted in the training of several "gatekeepers" in our community who are qualified to offer a one-hour training called "Question, Persuade and Refer" (QPR).

A QPR presentation is available for any local organization, church or other group that is interested in learning how to recognize the warning signs of suicide and what to do if an individual is suicidal. To schedule a QPR program, call the phone number listed

at the end of this column.

Most importantly, if you know someone who may have thoughts of suicide or if you yourself are suffering, please seek help immediately.

Call 911, go to a local emergency room or schedule an appointment with your doctor or a mental health professional, depending on the level of risk. Several organizations in our community provide mental health and addiction treatment and support groups and are available 24 hours, 7 days a week for assistance.

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