

# **Evaluation of the Health Provider Training in Adolescent Depression and Suicide Program**

Prepared by: Orla Shaughnessy, Magda Szumilas and Stan Kutcher, MD, FRCPC

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Suicide accounts for the loss of many lives globally and across Canada as well. Early recognition and appropriate treatment of affective and other psychiatric disorders, as well as comprehensive aftercare of persons with a high suicidal risk are known to be the most successful approaches to preventing suicide (Rihmer, 1996). Thus, training for health care workers has been widely advocated as a key route in suicide prevention (Gask, L. 2006). This report highlights findings from an evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of the Understanding Youth Depression and Suicide Education Training Program for Health Professionals conducted by Dr Stan Kutcher, Sun Life Financial Chair in Adolescent Mental Health, Dalhousie University & IWK Health Centre, Halifax, NS. The evaluation was commissioned in Winter 2009 and the results detailed here pertain to workshops offered between February 2007 and May 2009.

The “Understanding Adolescent Depression and Suicide Education Training Program” builds on best evidence approaches to addressing youth suicide and teaches health providers to understand, recognize, assess, treat and when to refer for subspecialty care, depressed and suicidal youth. The Program is based on adult education principles and stresses the importance of critical evaluation of scientific information and learning how to think about the complex issues of adolescent depression and suicide. Not only does it provide best evidence and most up-to-date information on these topics, it gives participants the tools to be able to assess and understand new information as it become available, thus providing the basis for lifelong learning. It is designed to enhance the knowledge and competencies in all health providers so that they can better understand these issues and effectively address them in their day to day practice. Findings from the research summarized in this report showed a significant increase in knowledge about depression and suicide with an average improvement of a statistically significant 20% at post test across all professionals groups.

In youth, it is the second or third most common cause of death. For every, person that dies by suicide, many more (family, friends, neighbours, etc) are affected. Youth suicide is widely regarded as an important public health program and numerous approaches to suicide prevention have been developed, many of them endorsed and applied with little evidence of effectiveness.

The program presenter Dr Stan Kutcher also received critical acclaim from participants, who generally rated the program as overall excellent with information and competencies learned highly applicable for their practice.

## OBJECTIVES

**The objectives of the “Understanding Adolescent Depression and Suicide Education Training Program” are to:**

1. Improve mental health literacy among health providers particularly in their understanding of depression and its role in suicide.
2. Train participants to recognize and assess depressed and/or suicidal youth.
3. Educate physicians and other healthcare professionals in the diagnosis, effective treatment and/or further referral of depressed or suicidal patients.
4. Improve mental health awareness and facilitate communication between educators and health providers.
5. Promote critical understanding of both public health and clinical approaches to understanding youth depression and suicide prevention.

## METHODS

### ***What is the Program About?***

A necessary foundation for addressing suicide prevention through gatekeeper training is the enhancement of mental health literacy among health care providers. The “Understanding Adolescent Depression and Suicide Education Training Program” teaches a variety of health providers (doctors, public health nurses, nurse practitioners, psychiatrists, social workers, etc) to understand, recognize, assess, treat and refer depressed and suicidal youth. The Program is based on adult education principles and stresses the importance of critical evaluation of scientific information and learning how to think about the complex issues of adolescent depression and suicide. Not only does it provide best evidence and most up-to-date information on these topics, it gives participants the tools to be able to assess and understand new information as it become available, thus providing the basis for lifelong learning.

The program is presented as a 2-day workshop:

- Day 1 focuses on understanding adolescent depression with an overview of the concept of adolescence, concepts fundamental to understanding mood and its disturbances, differentiation of depression from distress and scientific data on mental disorders and depression. Clinically useful tools are presented (e.g. Kutcher Adolescent Depression Scale – KADS).
- Day 2 involves understanding youth suicide, suicide rates in Canada, myths concerning suicide causality and various approaches to suicide prevention. It concludes with discussions on suicide prevention strategies and their effectiveness.

In conjunction with this program is the sister training program for Educators. This involves a 1-day professional development workshop designed to provide educators with evidence-based information about adolescent depression and youth suicide. The goal is to teach educators how to effectively identify, evaluate and provide appropriate intervention for depressed and/or suicidal youth. The link between both programs is that Educators, like Health Professionals have a unique opportunity to play an important role in the health and well being of Canadian youth.

### ***Who is the Program For?***

Health professionals who would benefit for this program include public health nurses, social workers, nurse practitioners, health educators, youth workers, psychology professionals, physicians and administrators (Health Sector).

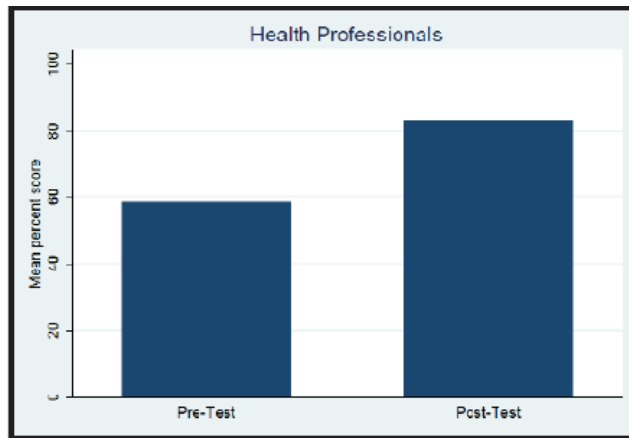
## **RESULTS**

### **Program Results:**

Since April 2007, over 300 health professionals in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Atlantic Canada, Ontario and British Columbia working in high schools, hospitals, and colleges have participated in this evidence-supported youth suicide training program.

Results from these tests show that participants' knowledge about depression and suicide improved significantly after the workshop, with an average improvement of 20% at post-test.

The program presenter Dr Stan Kutcher also received critical acclaim from participants. Among 376 participants, nearly 90 percent gave that training an overall rating of 4 or 5 (out of a maximum 5) and 8 out of 10 percent rated the training "better" or "much better" than similar workshops they had previously attended. Participants also had very positive reviews with regards to the usefulness of information provided in workshop, their enjoyment of the workshop, speaker quality, applicability of information and concepts to their day to day practice, and recommendation of this training workshop to colleagues.



[Graph sourced from Szumilas, M. (2010) Short Report – Health Provider Training in Adolescent Depression and Suicide.] \*significant at  $p < 0.001$

## CONCLUSION

The Understanding Adolescent Depression and Suicide Education Training Program is an evidence based gatekeeper type program that has been shown to significantly improve health provider knowledge about and competencies in assessment and treatment of depressed and/or suicidal youth. It is extremely well received by all health providers and has been demonstrated to be useful for their day to day practice.

For more information about how to access the program can be obtained by visiting [teenmentalhealth.org](http://teenmentalhealth.org) or contacting Amy MacKay at [amy.mackay@iwk.nshealth.ca](mailto:amy.mackay@iwk.nshealth.ca) or 902-470-6598.

## REFERENCES

- Gask, L. (2006). “Evaluating STORM skills training for managing people at risk of suicide”, Authors Journal Nursing and HealthCare Management and Policy 2006.
- Rihmer, Z. (1995). “Strategies of suicide prevention: Focus on health care”; Journal of Affective Disorders 39 (1996) 83-91
- Isaac, M., Elias, B., Katz, LY, Belik, SL, Deane, FP, Enns, MW, et al. Gatekeeper training as a preventative intervention for suicide: a systematic review. Can.J.Psychiatry 2009 Apr;54(4):260-268.
- Kutcher, S., & Cheil, S. (2007). Suicide Risk Management: A Manual for Health Professionals. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.