

FAST FACTS

September is suicide prevention month, and today September 17th is the third annual National Physician Suicide Awareness day. The primary purpose of the event is to create a day to commemorate colleagues lost to suicide and to raise awareness about the issue internally and externally by shedding a light on it. Through this, we hope that we will lessen the stigma for physicians and all other clinicians to speak about their struggles either privately or openly - and seek help.

The COVID-19 pandemic makes this year's NPSA extremely important. Physicians and health care providers serving on the frontlines are under a critically high degree of stress and burnout. Though many physicians are suffering depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues they do not seek professional support for fear of reprisal.

In April this year we tragically lost one of our own emergency medicine physicians, Dr. Lorna Breen, to suicide. Dr. Breen was serving as the director of an incredibly hard-hit New York emergency department during the peak of the pandemic and had contracted COVID-19 herself. Dr. Breen had no history of depression, anxiety, or risk factors for suicide. Her family watched her physical and mental exhaustion climb to critical levels yet she did not seek help fearing disclosure would end her career. Lorna's family wants to remove barriers for health care professionals to seeking treatment for mental health and created the [Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes' Foundation](#)



National Physician Suicide Awareness Day

This foundation will support nonprofit organizations who provide mental health support to health care providers nationwide.

The theme for NPSA this year is "One of Us". More than one physician dies by suicide every day. Dr. Breen was "one of us" and we must change the culture of suffering in silence. As Dr. Jay Lynch, M.D. says "The key is to get people talking, so they realize, 'Oh, I'm not alone.'" We do not have to choose between our careers and our mental health.

Physicians

- Historical data suggests 300 to 400 doctors die by suicide each year, however that number is likely underestimated.
- A better statistic is that physicians die by suicide at a rate that is more than double the general population.
- The suicide rate among male physicians is 1.41 times higher than the general male population. And among female physicians, the relative risk is even more pronounced — 2.27 times greater than the general female population.
- Physicians and trainees can experience high degrees of mental health distress and are less likely than other members of the public to seek mental health treatment.
- In some states physicians who seek mental health assistance may be

asked to report mental health issues with licensing and credentialing which often decreases help seeking behaviors.

Resident:

- 28% of residents experience a major depressive episode during training versus 7-8% of similarly aged individuals in the U.S. population.
- Overall suicide is the #2 cause of resident death. #1 cause of death in male and #2 cause of death in female residents.
- The greatest proportion of residents that died by suicide are PGY1s.
- In one study, 23 percent of interns had suicidal thoughts. However, among those interns who completed four sessions of web-based cognitive behavior therapy, suicidal ideation decreased by nearly 50 percent.

RN:

- Some data suggests that up to 85% of nurses have experienced bullying at some point in their career.
- Nurses are 23% more likely to die by suicide than women in general and 4x greater than the population in general

EMT:

- A recent survey of 4,000 first responders found that 6.6 percent had attempted suicide, which is more than 10 times the rate in the general population and has prompted more research into the issue.
- Suicides among first responders, often driven by emotional strain in a culture that long has discouraged showing weakness, are too

common, according to organizations that track the deaths.

Take Home Messages:

- Know where you can go for help, or where to refer a colleague/friend
- For every one person who dies by suicide, 280 others have thought about it
- “Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about”
 - If something seems off with your colleague, ask, “Are you ok?”
- Remember that we are responsible for the next generation of clinicians

For more information visit:

www.cordem.org/npsa

