Suicide Prevention: It takes all of us

Sadly, there is no community, family, or individual who is immune from the tragedy of suicide. Our own Carleton community experienced loss by suicide during the last several months. Suicide is complicated and tragic but it is often preventable. Knowing the warning signs for suicide and how to get help can help save lives. The National Institute of Mental Health offers the following 5 Action Steps for Helping Someone in Emotional Pain:

1. **Ask:** “Are you thinking about killing yourself?” It’s not an easy question but studies show that asking at-risk individuals if they are suicidal does not increase suicides or suicidal thoughts.

2. **Keep them safe:** Reducing a suicidal person’s access to highly lethal items or places is an important part of suicide prevention. While this is not always easy, asking if the at-risk person has a plan and removing or disabling the lethal means can make a difference.

3. **Be there:** Listen carefully and learn what the individual is thinking and feeling. Findings suggest acknowledging and talking about suicide may in fact reduce rather than increase suicidal thoughts. Submit a Community Concern Form to let others in the Carleton community know your friend might need help.

4. **Help them connect:** Save the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline’s number in your phone so it’s there when you need it: 800-273-8255 (TALK). You can also help make a connection with a trusted individual like a family member, friend, spiritual advisor, or mental health professional. Carleton students can call Student Health and Counseling (SHAC) at 507-222-4080, or contact the 24/7/365 Phone Counseling Service at 855-705-2479. In an emergency situation, contact Carleton Security at 507-222-4444 or call 911.

5. **Stay connected:** Staying in touch after a crisis or after being discharged from care can make a difference. Studies have shown the number of suicide deaths goes down when someone follows up with the at-risk person.

99% immunization rate helps avoid mumps outbreak

Carleton community members were notified in early February of a confirmed case of the mumps on our campus. As soon as the first case was confirmed, Student Health and Counseling (SHAC) began working in tandem with the Minnesota Department of Health. They guided us in communicating with the entire Carleton community, with particular emphasis on those who may have been under-immunized or who may have had direct contact with the confirmed case. Thankfully, no additional confirmed cases were discovered, although several individuals were tested.

All students entering Carleton as new students are required by SHAC to provide documentation of several immunizations, including two doses of MMR, the vaccine that protects against measles, mumps and rubella. (Students are able to submit a notarized document if they are not vaccinated due to religious convictions or medical reasons.) Reported immunizations are recorded in each student’s medical record.

When asked by the Minnesota Department of Health how many students were not immunized, we were able to access this information quickly and inform them with confidence that fewer than 20 students met that criteria. It is still possible for someone with two doses of MMR to contract the mumps, but our high rate of immunization certainly helped contain the disease and avoid a larger outbreak.
Unfortunately, concussions are a common occurrence among active young people, and Carls are no exception. At Student Health and Counseling (SHAC), 20 different students have been diagnosed with concussions since the start of fall term, and those 20 have had 50 appointments with SHAC medical providers. This number may not include those who sought care from the college trainers, team physician, or an off-campus provider. The warm weather during spring term often draws more students outdoors, resulting in an increase in injuries and, sometimes, concussions.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury—or TBI—caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or by a hit to the body that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. This sudden movement can cause the brain to bounce around or twist in the skull, creating chemical changes in the brain and sometimes stretching and damaging brain cells.”

People who have suffered concussions may report the following symptoms:
- Headache or “pressure” in head.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Balance problems or dizziness, or double or blurry vision.
- Bothered by light or noise.
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy.
- Confusion, or concentration or memory problems.
- Just not “feeling right,” or “feeling down”.

If a friend or teammate has had a blow to the head, you may observe the following:
- Can’t recall events prior to or after a hit or fall.
- Appears dazed or stunned.
- Forgets an instruction, is confused about an assignment or position, or is unsure of the game, score, or opponent.
- Moves clumsily.
- Answers questions slowly.
- Loses consciousness (even briefly).
- Shows mood, behavior, or personality changes.

The CDC states that “medical providers may describe a concussion as a ‘mild’ brain injury because concussions are usually not life-threatening.” However, the effects can be serious and may interfere with a person’s ability to function as a student. Rest is crucial after a concussion because it helps the brain heal. Students may need to limit physical activities or other tasks that involve a lot of concentration, such as studying or working on the computer. These activities may worsen concussion symptoms such as headache or fatigue. After a concussion, the student should be monitored carefully by a medical provider who can help determine when they can return to normal activities.

(Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

**Emotional well-being a Carleton priority**

Last spring, Carleton joined The Campus Program (CP), a nationwide initiative of The Jed Foundation, designed to empower schools with a framework and customized support to enhance student well-being, substance abuse, and suicide prevention efforts. The Campus Program is a 4-year strategic collaboration that not only assesses and enhances the work that is already being done at Carleton, but helps create positive, lasting, systemic change in the Carleton community. By becoming a member of JED Campus, Carleton demonstrates its commitment to the emotional well-being of students. More information will be provided to the campus community as we move forward in creation and assessment of our strategic plan to enhance emotional well-being at Carleton.

**Watch mySHAC in action!**

In order to help new (and returning) students better navigate their way around managing their own health care, SHAC has created a series of tutorial videos demonstrating some of the many features of the mySHAC patient portal. There are also videos detailing how to complete requirements for incoming students.

*mySHAC* allows Carleton students to manage much of their campus healthcare online anytime, including scheduling certain appointment types, sending/receiving secure messages, cancelling appointments, accessing required pre-visit forms and more!

Check out the videos by clicking on the “mySHAC” tab at go.carleton.edu/shac.