



Preventing Suicide in Wyoming

BY ROBERT MONGER, MD



Wyoming had the second highest suicide rate of any state in the nation in 2018, the most recent year for which suicide data is available from the National Center for Health Statistics.

The suicide rate in Wyoming was 25.4 suicides per 100,000 population. New Mexico had the highest suicide rate at 25.6 per 100,000; the national average was 14.8 per 100,000; and the state with the lowest rate was New Jersey at 8.7 per 100,000.

**We all have a part to play
in combating suicide.**

According to the American Association of Suicidology, suicide ranks as the tenth leading cause of death in United States, and it ranks as the second leading cause of death for 15 to 34-year-olds, after accidents. The 2018 national rate of 14.8 suicides per 100,000 is the highest rate observed in the United States since the 1930s (the highest year on record is 1938 when it was 15.25).


What can physicians do? There is mixed evidence for the effectiveness of screening general populations of patients to try and identify those at risk for suicide. The United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) concluded in 2016 that routine screening for suicide risk has not been proven to be of benefit and that current evidence is insufficient to recommend for or against screening in primary care. The USPSTF does, however, state that monitoring and reassessing risk for suicide may be justified in patients with a history of suicidal intent or behavior, especially those with mental health diagnoses.

However, Wyoming physicians commonly identify patients at risk for suicide and have many resources available to help our patients and their families.

The Wyoming Department of Health (WDH) Injury and Violence Prevention Program publishes a Wyoming Suicide Prevention Resource Guide that details many different suicide prevention efforts across the state, and the WDH website (health.wyo.gov) lists contact information for local community prevention specialists and community mental health provid-

ers, as well as links to a number of different suicide prevention training programs. Additionally, there is information for LGBTQ suicide prevention resources at both the state and national level, and contact information for Drew's Decision, an organization with an office in Casper that is dedicated to suicide prevention, crisis intervention, and support to survivors of suicide loss.

Grace For 2 Brothers in Cheyenne advocates for suicide prevention through awareness and education, providing assistance to those in crisis and support to survivors. The organization initiated a free gun lock safety program in 2017 that provides free gun locks through many locations such as police stations, emergency rooms, and city/county health buildings. Since the program started over 15,000 gun locks have been distributed in various counties in Wyoming including Albany, Park, Laramie, and Campbell. Studies have shown that keeping guns locked and unloaded is significantly associated with lower levels of suicides and accidents among adolescents in gun owning households.

Suicide is a significant public health issue and we clinicians can have an important role in suicide education, intervention, and support. With Wyoming's persistently high suicide rates, we all have a part to play in combating suicide. 

A NOTE FROM DR. MONGER: PRINTING DURING A PANDEMIC

It's amazing what can change in the course of a month. When I wrote this column, COVID-19 had not reached the U.S. much less Wyoming. While I plan to write about the pandemic in the fall issue of Wyoming Medicine, I thought it was important to remember that we are still fighting other battles too. Suicide is of major concern in Wyoming, and we as physicians can aid the prevention effort.

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