

let's talk about

health

Let's Talk About Health is a regular column produced by MidCentral District Health Board. If you have any feedback or suggestions for future topics, please phone (06) 350 8945 or email communications@midcentraldhb.govt.nz



Being Open About Suicide

Every year hundreds of New Zealanders lose family members and friends to suicide. Suicide is a major health and social issue in New Zealand, prevalent in our communities, and yet is rarely talked about. However, being open, aware, and communicating about mental and physical wellbeing, is one way of tackling this issue.

PREVENTING SUICIDE IN OUR COMMUNITY

MidCentral DHB Mental Health Services Clinical Director, Dr Jerry Varghese (pictured), believes the prevention of suicide and the key to mental wellbeing lies within healthy communities.

“Suicide is the extreme result of when someone feels they cannot cope with life. With many health and social issues, such as binge drinking and obesity, the most successful prevention is when action is taken early. As a community, there is a responsibility to provide support systems for those feeling vulnerable around us.

“Suicide is complex and its prevention requires a combined effort by individuals, families, organisations, and specialist services.

“For example, some people begin to feel hopeless and overwhelmed when they feel they are struggling to cope with some of the stresses in their life. Stress is an individual's perception of what they

are faced with, and how they decide to deal with stress can impact on their mental wellbeing and their life.

“People face stress and challenges throughout all stages of their life. This can stem from social situations, bullying, broken relationships, financial stress, redundancy, loss of partners, loneliness, isolation, pain and illness.

“Learning ways of building a healthy resilience against life's challenges is important to maintaining good mental wellbeing. Often people who are struggling to cope will resort to substance abuse in an attempt to feel better. However, this can lead to impaired judgement where suicide may be the end result.”

But there are healthy ways to cope with life's challenges says Dr Varghese. “We openly talk about eating well, getting enough sleep, and being active to keep us well physically. So why not open up more about our mental health and wellbeing?”

“Suicide shouldn't be a taboo topic, especially if talking about it has the potential to save lives and prevention is most successful when it takes place in the early stages.”

Dr Varghese says if you feel you aren't coping or you think someone around you is struggling, its best to seek help early.

“If you are feeling down or hopeless, the best thing you can do is talk about it and surround yourself with a support system. Participate in things you enjoy, talk to your family, your friends, colleagues, a spiritual group or one of the many community groups out there that are ready to help you. There is always someone you can reach out to.

“Try and remember that it's okay to feel this way and it's also okay to talk about it. It doesn't matter who you are or what role you play in society, it's always okay to seek help.”

As a community, a friend, or a family member it is important to recognise when someone is struggling to cope. Sometimes there can be no signs, but often there will be a behaviour change. You might notice someone has withdrawn from things they have previously found enjoyment in, they could stop doing their homework, withdraw from sports and hobbies, giving away their possessions, or resorting to substance abuse.

Communication is key says Dr Varghese, “If you are worried about someone, talk to them about it. If it doesn't work the first time, try again, and keep trying. It is important to give them lots of opportunities to open up about how they are feeling.

“If someone reaches out to you, listen to them. So often we get so busy and caught up in our own lives we forget to take time out to spend time and talk with the people we care about.

“Suicide prevention is about taking a healthy approach to life. Part of building resilience against life's challenges is learning good life skills. This includes: setting goals, decision making, learning how to communicate well with your social peers and your family, being physically healthy, and learning the best ways to manage conflicts you may face.”

SUPPORT AND INFORMATION CAN BE OBTAINED FROM A WIDE RANGE OF SOURCES

• Samaritans – 0800 726 666 • Youthline – 0800 376 633 •

• Acute Mental Health Emergency – 0800 653 357 •

• Suicide Prevention Information New Zealand www.spinz.org.nz/page/5-Home

• The Manawatu Mental Health Directory includes community, professional, family and a wide range of other support groups/services www.journeystowellbeing.org.nz/advocacy.html

If you would like a hardcopy of this, please phone the MidCentral District Health Board Communications Unit on (06) 350 8945.