Physical Illness, Psychiatric Disorders, and Suicide

January 15, 2016
News Type: Weekly Spark, Weekly Spark Research

A study in Denmark demonstrated that although both physical illnesses and psychiatric disorders individually increase suicide risk, people afflicted with both types of disorders are at significantly higher risk for suicide than those with only one. The authors suggested that it is important to (1) treat physical illnesses among people with psychiatric disorders to reduce their suicide risk and (2) screen and treat people with long-term physical illnesses for psychiatric illness, hopelessness, and suicidal ideation.

The authors also suggested that the rate of suicides associated with poisonings among people with physical illnesses demonstrates a “need for careful management and control over medication used to treat physical illness especially when comorbid psychiatric disorder is present.” The authors speculated that “alcohol and drugs are often used to help ease painful symptoms or distressed mood induced by physical illness…” The rate of suicides associated with poisonings was significantly higher among patients with a physical illness than among other people who died by suicide, although the research could not determine if these poisonings involved prescription medications.
