Postvention as a Prevention Tool: Developing a Comprehensive Campus Response to Prevent Suicide Contagion
Learning Objectives

1. Define postvention and its critical role in addressing and preventing suicide contagion;

2. Identify the importance of involving key stakeholders in the development, implementation, and evaluation of postvention protocols;

3. Identify and know how to address two key postvention issues – utilizing social media after a student suicide and planning memorial services - with an aim to prevent suicide contagion.
What is Postvention?

Postvention as a Prevention Tool
A Few Definitions

- “The provision of crisis intervention and other support after a suicide has occurred to address and alleviate possible effects of suicide.” (SPRC Postvention Workgroup Definition)
- “… interventions occurring after a tragedy.” (Meilman, 2006)
- “The goal of postvention is to reduce the negative impact of a suicide on ‘survivors.’” (Cerel, & Campbell, 2008)
“Planning around one component impacts the planning (and ultimately the effectiveness) of the other two areas.”

(The Jed Foundation, 2006)
Implementing and Evaluating Postvention Efforts

A Protocol is Key
Developing a Protocol

FRAMEWORK
Framework for Developing Institutional Protocols for the Acutely Distressed or Suicidal College Student

http://www.jedfoundation.org/professionals/programs-and-research/framework
Considerations for Developing a Protocol

- First responders
- Communications with the campus community
- Communications with the media
Considerations for Developing a Protocol

- Types of support services
- Targeted outreach
- Debriefing with staff
- Lack of established protocol
During protocol development:

- Include a broad base of stakeholders
- Define the terminology you will use
- Consider the ethnic, racial, cultural, and spiritual diversity of your student body

(The Jed Foundation, 2006)
Making the Most of Your Protocol

Implementation:

- Determine how you will disseminate and educate the campus community on protocol
- Identify a “point person(s)” to respond to all questions about the protocol
- Engage in regular table-top exercises
- Develop a revision plan

(The Jed Foundation, 2006)
Special Issues in Postvention
Addressing Student, Campus, & Community Needs
Safe Reporting Guidelines

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPORTING ON SUICIDE

Developed in collaboration with: American Association of Suicidology, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, Annenberg Public Policy Center, Associated Press Managing Editors, Canterbury Suicide Project - University of Otago, Christchurch, New Zealand, Columbia University Department of Psychiatry, ConnectSafe.org, Emotion Technology, International Association for Suicide Prevention Task Force on Media and Suicide, Medical University of Vienna, National Alliance on Mental Illness, National Institute of Mental Health, National Press Photographers Association, New York State Psychiatric Institute, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Suicide Awareness Voices of Education, Suicide Prevention Resource Center, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and UCLA School of Public Health, Community Health Sciences.

IMPORTANT POINTS FOR COVERING SUICIDE

- More than 50 research studies worldwide have found that certain types of news coverage can increase the likelihood of suicide in vulnerable individuals. The magnitude of the increase is related to the amount, duration and prominence of coverage.

- Risk of additional suicides increases when the story explicitly describes the suicide method, uses dramatic/graphic headlines or images, and repeated/extensive coverage sensationalizes or glamorizes a death.

- Covering suicide carefully, even briefly, can change public misperceptions and correct myths, which can encourage those who are vulnerable or at risk to seek help.

Suicide is a public health issue. Media and online coverage of suicide should be informed by using best practices. Some suicide deaths may be newsworthy. However, the way media cover suicide can influence behavior negatively by contributing to contagion or positively by encouraging help-seeking.

References and additional information can be found at: www.ReportingOnSuicide.org.

Suicide Contagion or “Copycat Suicide” occurs when one or more suicides are reported in a way that contributes to another suicide.

Working with the Media

- Sticking to protocol
- Preparation of materials prior to an incident
- Teachable moments
Postvention and Social Media

- Distribution of information and resources
- Monitoring student and campus response to a student suicide
- Collaboration with family to:
  - Ensure that families monitor deceased student’s social networking sites
  - Bypass privacy settings that might prohibit interventions
- Awareness of Facebook guidelines on reporting suicidal online activity
Memorials for other types of deaths

Multiple suicides

Input from family

Ensuring safe messaging

Other ways to honor the deceased
HISTORY: A TECH TRADITION

When the Whistle Blows is one of the Institute's most revered traditions. Established in 2001, When the Whistle Blows honors the memory of those enrolled students or employees of the Institute who have died during the previous year.

The ceremony is steeped in the richest of Georgia Tech traditions. The Ramblin' Rock, a 1930 Model A Ford and the Institute's first official mascot, leads families into the ceremony. Members of the Army, Navy, and Air Force ROTC units serve as escorts for the families. As Georgia Tech was one of the first schools in the nation to have a Reserved Officers Training Corps program, a unity candle is lit, representing the Georgia Tech community—more than 20,000 students, staff, faculty, and administrators who compromise the Institute. The Alma Mater reminds us of our Tech ancestry and relays the hope that we will always be united as a community.

The Whistle originated in the late 1800s at the time of Lyman Hall, the second president of Georgia Tech. The sound of Tech's steam whistle resounded throughout Atlanta, becoming not only a landmark for the institute, but also a timepiece for the surrounding community. Throughout the decades, the Whistle continued to keep time, whether calling students to the classroom or celebrating a football victory. Today, as in years past, the sound of the Whistle always marks the end of one chapter and the beginning of something new. It remains a deeply engrained tradition unique to Georgia Tech, and we proudly remember those who are no longer with us by a salute from the Whistle. After the Whistle is blown for each of the community members who have died over the last year, a final blast from the Whistle memorializes all extended members of our campus community who have died (alumni, noncurrent faculty and staff, and friends of the Institute).

http://www.whenthewhistleblows.gatech.edu/
Questions?
A Case Example

Addressing Student Suicide through Postvention
University Center within 64-campus SUNY System
- Urban Setting
- Research University
- NCAA Division I

Students:
- Undergraduates - 13,457
- Graduate Students - 4,977

Faculty: 4,977

Employees: 4,197

Degree Programs:
- Undergraduate - 61
- Masters - 89
- Doctorate - 39
Comprehensive Program of UAlbany

- Presidential Leadership
- Campus Task Force: ”BRisk”
- Student Involvement/Leadership
- Social Marketing/Social Norms
- Campus-Community Partnerships
- Education
- Gatekeeper Training
- Early Intervention
- Policy Evaluation/Enforcement
- Parental Involvement
- Treatment & Referral
- Research and Program Evaluation
Spectrum of Intervention Response: Suicide Prevention

**Universal Prevention**
- Stigma Reduction Media Campaign
- Peer Services (Peer Education and Hotline Services)
- Educational Brochures

**Early Intervention**
- “Save-A-Life” Gatekeeper Training Program for Faculty, Staff, and Students
- PRISM (Proximate Risk Index and Screening Measure) Screenings
- Consultations with faculty, staff, students, and parents

**Specialized Interventions**
- CARE Net (Consultation and Resource Evaluation) Program
- Treatment and Referral
- Response to Urgent or Emergent Situations
The STEPS Comprehensive Suicide Prevention Program Model

- Sustaining Student Success
- Preventing Suicide Risk Behaviors & Promoting Healthy Behaviors
- Engaging Students, Faculty, Staff, & Families in Education About Suicide Prevention
- Training Potential Campus Responders & Strengthening a Campus Comprehensive Care Network
- Screening and Early Intervention for Students at Risk for Suicide and Related Risk Factors

“Partnerships Working to Prevent Student Suicide... One Step at a Time”
Areas for Postvention

- Student death and other serious campus incidents
  - Response guided by *Responding to Students in Crisis* protocol

- Suicide/homicide attempt or incident in which intent is evident
  - Response guided by *CARE Net (Consultation and Resource Evaluation) Program* protocol
1) Provide support and assistance to the students in crisis and to insure their safety and the safety of others.

2) Respond, as confidentiality regulations permit, to persons or groups such as:
   a. the student’s parents, legal guardians, and/or significant others,
   b. the student’s friends, roommates, suitemates, and hall residents,
   c. various University offices to provide services and support to the student and other affected members of the University community,
   d. the University and Albany communities, as appropriate.

3) Address system-wide issues surrounding the crisis.

4) Work toward the prevention of similar crises in the future.
Responding to Student in Crisis

Key Elements

- Confidentiality
- Judgment
- Coordination
- Support
The CARE Net Program: Postvention for Suicide Risk

- Assess present suicide risk
- Evaluate student’s willingness and ability to refrain from threatened and actual self-injurious behaviors
- Provide consultation regarding recommended psychiatric, psychological, and educational services
The CARE Net Program: Postvention for Suicide Risk

- Minimize disruption of normal functioning for roommates and suitemates in the residence community
- Augment existing crisis intervention services, psychological treatment resources, and consultation with Residential Life staff and students
Addressing Suicide Contagion: Spring 2011

Timeline

- February 2011
- April 2011
- May 2011
- Fall 2011
- Spring 2012
- Future Prevention Efforts
Discussion

- Now let’s hear from you
Thank You!

Questions?
University at Albany Crisis Protocol and Postvention Materials:
http://www.albany.edu/studentaffairs/faculty/albany_only/

Postvention Workshop Session at the 2009 GLS Grantee Meeting:


Centre for Suicide Prevention. School Memorials After a Suicide: Helpful or Harmful?: Available by request at http://suicideinfo.ca/AboutUs/ContactUs.aspx


Clinician Survivor Task Force. Clinicians as Survivors: After a Suicide Loss: http://mypage.iusb.edu/~jmcintos/therapists_mainpg.htm

Georgia Institute of Technology. When the Whistle Blows: http://www.whenthewhistleblows.gatech.edu/


Maine Youth Suicide Prevention Program. Media Guidelines for School Administrators Who May Interact with Reporters about Youth Suicide:
http://www.maine.gov/suicide/professionals/program/mediaschool.htm
Resources (continued)

- Recommendations for Reporting on Suicide: [http://reportingonsuicide.org](http://reportingonsuicide.org)
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