Educating Health Care Providers about Self-Injury

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Noting that non-suicidal self-injury (NNSI) is a widespread problem associated with increased suicide risk, and that many patients do not disclose their self-injury behaviors to their health care providers, researchers conducted a study to evaluate the effect of training in this area for health and mental health professionals. A study of medical and mental health professionals from Belgium revealed that those who had been trained about NSSI felt more knowledgeable about it, more empathetic toward those who self-injure, and more comfortable working with NNSI patients than those who had not received any training. Among those who had not received any training, mental health professionals felt more knowledgeable about the topic and more comfortable working with NNSI patients than did social workers or medical nurses. The authors suggest that educating mental health professionals about NNSI and providing mental health training to physicians, nurses, and social workers might improve the quality of care for NNSI patients and thereby increase their willingness to seek care.

Only 15 percent of the sample of social workers, psychologists, psychiatric nurses, and medical nurses had received any NSSI training. Of those who had been trained, psychologists reported a significantly greater level of knowledge and confidence than did members of the other professions. Of those who had not received any training, medical nurses felt the least knowledgeable and least comfortable working with NNSI patients.


SPRC Commentary

Our knowledge about non-suicidal self-injury and its relationship to suicidal behaviors has increased in recent years. To learn more about this important issue, we recommend reading an earlier Spark research summary, “Self-Injury and Suicide [1],” and viewing the archived webinar Understanding and Treating the Complex Puzzle of Non-Suicidal Self-Injury [2], produced by the Injury Control Research Center for Suicide Prevention

Settings: Health Care, Behavioral Health Care
About Suicide: Behavioral Health Disorders, Self-Injury (NSSI)

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