Pediatricians Urged to Screen for Suicide Risks among Teens

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The American Academy of Pediatrics has published updated guidelines advising pediatricians to screen adolescent patients for suicide risk. Since the original guidelines were published in 2007, suicide has risen from the third to the second leading cause of death among youth ages 15 to 19. The new report offers recommendations for identifying and assisting those at risk, encouraging physicians to look for risk factors such as a history of physical or sexual abuse; mood disorders; drug or alcohol abuse; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning sexual orientation. Being a victim or perpetrator of bullying is also a significant risk factor for suicidal thoughts and behavior, according to the report, especially when it is accompanied by other stressors. Christine Moutier, chief medical officer at the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, has praised the new guidelines, saying that screening for multiple sources of risk in adolescent patients “is the first critically important step in preventing suicide death.” Screening should ideally allow physicians to identify and then refer at-risk patients to mental health services, said report author Ben Shain, although he noted that a shortage of pediatric mental health professionals may often make referral a challenge.

Spark Extra! Read the full text of the report [2], and learn about the role of primary care in suicide prevention [3].

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