Children's Hospital of Philadelphia PolicyLab

Helping Hospitals Prevent Repeat Youth Suicide Attempts

Statement of Problem

Suicide is the third leading cause of death for U.S. adolescents, and suicide rates are constantly rising. One in ten high school students report having attempted suicide, and medical hospitalizations following youth suicide attempts have doubled in the past decade. Despite the fact that 60,000 youth are hospitalized for suicide attempt each year and that many youth attempt suicide multiple times, many medical hospital teams do not adequately ensure that youth who are discharged receive continuing mental health care. Attending a mental health follow-up visit after hospitalization is associated with as much as 75% lower risk of subsequent suicide attempt. To help hospitals prevent suicide among children and adolescents, there is a critical need to develop tools to disseminate best practices for mental health care after discharge from a suicide attempt.

Description

The study aims to identify which suicide prevention practices are effective for young people hospitalized for a suicide attempt. Throughout the course of the project, we will develop and test strategies for implementing effective suicide prevention practices in children's hospitals.

First, we will seek to collect information on existing practices and determine best practices for suicide prevention. Using a national sample of Medicaid claims and survey data, we will determine which hospital and community structures, such as the physical infrastructure and personnel embedded in the system, are associated with higher and lower rates of patient attendance at mental health follow-up visits among youth hospitalized for suicide.

Next, we will develop a toolkit that hospitals can use to reduce and prevent repeat suicide attempt among hospitalized youth. Along with an extensive literature review and qualitative interviews with hospital staff, we will use the information garnered from the first portion of this study to develop a youth suicide prevention toolkit. We're designing this resource to help inpatient medical units select and implement processes for safety planning and ensuring continuity of mental health care for youth at risk of suicide.

Finally, we will test the toolkit and evaluate its efficacy in our health system.

Next Steps

Once we develop the toolkit, we will conduct a pilot test in hospital inpatient units to determine how feasible the toolkit is to use and whether the toolkit is effective at improving clinical outcomes for youth. We will also use this study to develop methods for a future fully powered trial of the toolkit, with the ultimate goal of optimizing it for use at hospitals nationwide.

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Suggested Citation

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Feb 2023

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Association of Suicide Prevention Interventions With Subsequent Suicide Attempts, Linkage to Follow-up Care and Depression Symptoms for Acute Care Settings
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