Re-development of mental health first aid guidelines for suicidal ideation and behaviour and non-suicidal self-injury

Who we are
The Population Mental Health Group is based at the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health at the University of Melbourne and is collaborating with Mental Health First Aid Australia to develop these guidelines.

Background
6 years ago, we carried out Delphi studies across developed English-speaking countries to develop guidelines for members of the public providing first aid for people who are having suicidal thoughts or displaying suicidal behaviour, or engaging in non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI). These mental health first aid guidelines can be freely downloaded from the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) website (www.mhfa.com.au – click on ‘Guidelines’) and the NHMRC Clinical Practice Guidelines Portal (www.clinicalguidelines.gov.au). These guidelines have been incorporated into a 2nd edition MHFA course, launched in February 2010.

What we are now doing
The aim of this current research project is to re-develop guidelines for members of the public providing first aid for people who are having suicidal thoughts or displaying suicidal behaviour, or engaging in non-suicidal self-injury (NSSI).

Why we’re doing it
Suicide and NSSI are mental health problems of considerable public concern. 4% of the Western population are estimated to engage in self-harming behaviours, and suicide is a leading cause of death worldwide. As required for on-going listing on the NHMRC Clinical Practice Guidelines Portal, the guidelines are being updated to ensure they remain consistent with the current literature and contain the most recent and appropriate helping actions.

Furthermore, the need to combine suicide and NSSI guidelines has become apparent. Self-harm has been found to be a major risk factor for suicide. While suicide and NSSI are widely recognised as different behaviours, considerable overlap exists in the helping approach required to be taken by the first aider to help someone who they perceive to be suicidal or self-harming, particularly if there is uncertainty surrounding the intent of self-injury.

How we’re doing it
The guidelines will be formed on the basis of expert consensus. We are using two expert panels, one consisting of professionals and the other of mental health consumer advocates, both having expertise in suicide or NSSI. The strategies that receive a high level of endorsement from both panels will be included in the guidelines. Expert opinion will be surveyed via online questionnaires, with summaries of consensus levels fed back to the panel. The strategies in the questionnaire are obtained from websites, fact sheets, brochures, scientific journal articles, and prevention training course materials. Some of the statements may seem contradictory or controversial; however, these are included because they reflect the wide range of people’s beliefs about intervention and care.
Who we’re looking for
We are inviting people from English-speaking countries who are aged 18 years or over and who have expertise in the field of suicide and/or NSSI to be panel members. People who are being invited to become panel members are considered to have an expert level of knowledge about suicide and/or NSSI through their experience as a mental health professional or as a mental health consumer advocate.

In order to participate, we require experts to be:

- Able to complete 3 online questionnaires. Questionnaire completion involves: providing some general details such as age, gender and experience with adolescent mental health; rating basic mental health first aid strategies to be carried out by an adolescent. It is estimated that this will take around 3 hours in total.
- Have an excellent understanding of suicide and/or NSSI and their prevention; the signs and symptoms that people are likely to encounter and how to respond upon recognition of these
- Have experience working in the area of suicide or NSSI prevention or previous personal experience of suicide through past ideation or attempts or previous personal experience of engaging in NSSI in the past
- Aged 18 years or over

Given your expertise in the field, we would be grateful if you would consider being involved, as well as nominating other colleagues with similar expertise. We encourage you to forward this email to all relevant contacts who you believe meet the criteria and would be interested in participating.

Are there any risks?
Some people may find that reading the statements in the questionnaire upsets them, or may remind them of their own experiences. However, in our previous studies using this method only a very small number of people reported feeling upset. Many people in our previous studies have said they felt proud and happy to be able to contribute to a better understanding of how to help others. We advise anyone who finds themselves feeling upset to talk to their support people and decide whether they wish to continue with the questionnaire or stop.

If you feel you want to talk to someone about feeling upset, please call one of the recommended helplines (available 24hrs):

Australia
Lifeline: 13 11 14 (toll-free)

New Zealand
Lifeline New Zealand: 0800 543 354

United States
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (toll-free)

Canada
Crisis and Information Line: 1-888-562-1214 (toll-free)

United Kingdom
The Samaritans: 08457 90 90 90

If you change your mind
Participation in this project is voluntary. If you change your mind about participating, you are free to withdraw from the project at any time and you may also withdraw your data if you wish, simply by contacting the researcher Anna Ross at the details provided below.

Your privacy
Any data we collect from you will be held under password protection and not divulged to others. We are interested in the consensus views of the panel, rather than the views of individual members, so your individual answers will never be reported. We will only present the results in statistical summary form. Due to research code requirements, we will be storing the information collected for 5 years after the study, but none of your information will be identifiable or be able to be traced back to you.

If you are interested in participating or require further information
If you would like further information before deciding to participate, or if you are interested in participating, please contact Anna Ross (anross@unimelb.edu.au, +61-3-9035 7791).

If you have concerns about the project
If you have concerns about the scientific aspects of the study, please contact the coordinator of the project, Anna Ross (anross@unimelb.edu.au, +61-3-9035 7791) or Professor Tony Jorm (ajorm@unimelb.edu.au, +61 3 9035 7799)

This project has been approved by the University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have concerns about the ethics of the study, please contact: Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, ph: +61 3 8344 2073; fax: +61 3 9347 6739