Suicide prevention remains Navy leadership's top focus for 2010

A poster produced by the Defense Media Agency on suicide prevention. Suicide prevention continues to be one of the highest priorities for Navy leadership according to the most recent suicide prevention update released in NAVADMIN 054/10.

Official U.S. Navy illustration

By Navy Personnel Command Public Affairs

Suicide prevention continues to be one of the highest priorities for Navy leadership according to the most recent suicide prevention update released in NAVADMIN 054/10.

"Every single suicide loss is a tragedy with far reaching impact to the health and readiness of our entire Navy community," said Chief of Navy Personnel Vice Adm. Mark Ferguson in the message.

Suicide can be prevented, however, and the Navy's suicide prevention efforts have begun to make a difference, according to Lt. Cmdr. Bonnie Chavez, director of the Navy's Behavioral Health Program.

"Our most effective suicide prevention ultimately occurs at the local level, person to person. Awareness, skills and resources at the deckplates save lives," said Chavez. "Any one of us can have an opportunity to save a life."

According to Chavez, suicide is the result of a complex combination of factors that lead an individual to experience pain and suffering.

"They feel ineffective and start to think they don't belong or that they have become a burden to others," she said. "One-on-one communication and support is critical if we are to recognize a problem. We know that early intervention works."

Chavez reminds Sailors and families to remember the acronym "ACT" and to do just that if they suspect a person may be feeling suicidal.

"Ask if the person is suicidal. Care by listening and offering hope. Treat – stay with the person and get them to professional help," she said.

According to the 2009 Behavioral Health Quick Poll, many Sailors expect negative career consequences for getting help for stress reactions or suicidal ideas and expect to lose a security clearance, but Chavez points out that family and deployment-related counseling does not need to be mentioned on security clearance forms.

"Self referral for mental health is widely seen by professionals conducting clearance evaluations as demonstrating good judgment and reliability," Chavez said. "Most often, only when failure to get assistance leads to substance abuse, disciplinary infractions or substantial debt are clearances in jeopardy."

Navy officials are examining ways to eliminate other potential barriers to using needed psychological services and removing obstacles that hinder successful reintegration of Sailors in to the command, according to the NAVADMIN.

Education and training of Sailors, leaders and family members is a focus for 2010. According to the message, the Navy's Operational Stress Control program is becoming the cornerstone for all behavior health and readiness efforts, including suicide prevention.

Efforts this year will focus on improving family outreach, optimizing the interface between command leadership and medical treatment providers, and continuing to build a network of trained suicide prevention coordinators. The training will highlight the tools and techniques needed to build psychologically resilient Sailors, which can help them, their families and commands successfully navigate through stressful times.

"Reaching out to families is important because family members are often the first to notice a concern," Chavez said. "We must educate our families on warning signs, risk factors for suicide and how to access helpful resources. We also need to develop the relationships and a connection between commands and families before a crisis occurs."

Online program allows Sailors to verify medical, dental readiness

By Lt. Cmdr. James R. Hagen, NAVMISSA Public Affairs

Navy Medicine Information Systems Support Activity (NAVMISSA) based in San Antonio, announced the development of an online program that will support every Sailor.

The new NAVMISSA Web-based application allows Sailors for the first time to monitor their Individual Medical Readiness (IMR) status online.

Sailors can now review IMR medical and dental data from the Medical Readiness Reporting System (MRRS) via BUPERS Online (BOL) by going to https://www.bol.navy.mil and selecting the IMR Status link under the BOL Application Menu. IMR status determines if a Sailor is medically eligible to deploy.

"This additional application within BOL allows Sailors to ensure that all of their IMR requirements are current and see what their current IMR status is," said Elaine A. Shorkey, a NAVMISSA external liaison and project lead.

Maintaining accurate IMR status through MRRS is a high priority within Navy Medicine and directly supports the Navy Medicine goal of a fit and healthy force.

"The ability for individuals to monitor their IMR status will help to promote a healthy naval force and ensure our warfighters are medically prepared to meet their mission," said Capt. Tina L. Ortiz, NAVMISSA commanding officer. "It's every Sailor's responsibility to maintain their individual medical readiness. This tool empowers them to keep track of their IMR status and update it as necessary."

The new application is a module that displays information in an easy-to-follow format that resembles a report card. Sailors can review their physical health assessments, laboratory results, dental readiness and any medical conditions that may prohibit or limit deployment and post-deployment health assessments. It also shows when immunizations should be administered and when upcoming assessments should be completed. A Sailor's overall IMR status is assessed into one of four categories:

- Fully medically ready
- Partially medically ready
- Not medically ready
- Medical readiness indeterminate

A fully ready status means the Sailor is current in all medical categories and is not considered at risk to experience a dental emergency, thus deployable worldwide. A partially ready status means the Sailor lacks one or more immunization, laboratory results or medical equipment such as a gas mask insert. These limitations can be quickly resolved and allow the member to deploy once corrected.

Not medically ready means the Sailor has a chronic or prolonged deployment-limiting condition and cannot deploy. This status includes Sailors who are hospitalized or convalescing from serious illness or injury, or they fall into a dental class three – considered to be at an increased risk to experience a dental emergency.

The last category, medical readiness indeterminate, applies to Sailors whose health status cannot be determined because of missing information such as lost medical records or an overdue assessment.

According to Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class (SW) Amado A. Rivera, who is an administrative assistant for the Navy Medicine Support Command (NMSC) headquarters in Jacksonville, Fla., NAVMISSA's parent command, the IMR status of deploying Sailors has been a potential problem for a long time.

"IMR verification will [now] allow Sailors simple access to helpful medical information as they prepare to deploy," said Rivera, who has served aboard three ships.

For Chief Storekeeper (SW) Sierra Elam, the new NAVMISSA Web-based application is a major breakthrough.

"I've served on four ships," said Elam, NMSC command career counselor and administrative leading chief petty officer. "Knowing who's in and who is out could turn a bad situation into a manageable one. For a leading chief, this is ground breaking."