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50 Years Ago in *The Journal of Pediatrics*

Suicide among Adolescents with Chronic Illness: A Path Forward

Weinberg S. Suicidal Intent in Adolescence: A Hypothesis about the Role of Physical Illness. J Pediatr 1970:77:579-86.

Similar to 1970, suicides continue to be a major cause of death among adolescents with chronic illness. Weinberg describes 12 adolescents who had expressed suicide intent while hospitalized for a medical condition or were admitted after attempting suicide. Chronic illness was a significant contributing factor, and the authors felt that the suicide intent was due to concerns about impact of illness on their lives. These included factors such as the inability to obtain a job in the future and the pain of separation from an important person. Some adolescents viewed illness as an obstacle to success, blaming themselves for difficulty in underachieving, whereas in others, suicidal intent was linked to family discord. Weinberg described sex-related differences in these concerns.

Fifty years later, suicide continues to be a leading cause of death in adolescents, with significant sex differences. Although adolescent suicide attempts are twice as high in females, completed suicides are 3 times higher in males than in females.[1] Suicide intent and attempts continue to be common among adolescents with chronic illness. However, depression and mood disorders are now known to be significant and modifiable risk factors for all sexes.[2] Given the path from chronic illness to depression and mood disorders to suicide, pediatricians and pediatric subspecialists have instituted screening for depression, anxiety, and suicidal risk with tools such as the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 for depression and the Global Assessment of Disability-7 for anxiety. Unfortunately, connection to mental health services remains a challenge for all adolescents.[1] Many pediatric subspecialty groups now employ social workers and counselors in their subspecialty clinics to immediately connect adolescents with chronic illness with suspected co-occurring depression and mood disorders to needed assessments and services. Appropriate screening and provision of mental health resources to adolescents with chronic illness provide a much needed mechanism to reduce the number of attempted and completed suicides.

Sharon C. Enujioke, MD
Mary A. Ott, MD, MA
University School of Medicine
Indianapolis, Indiana

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