



NEWS RELEASE

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Suicide prevention awareness

Radio talk show highlights need to care for others

Heidelberg, Germany – A team of experts provided suicide prevention information and advice during a one-hour AFN-Europe OpenLine radio talk show Feb. 25.

Their message: notice your buddy's mood changes. Show concern if they are depressed. Let them know you care and will do anything to help bring them back from suicidal thoughts.

Members of the panel included Dr. Joy Summerlin, the U.S. Army Europe G-1 Well-Being Quality of Life program manager; Maj. Shawn Connors, the Mannheim garrison chaplain; Maj. David Cabrera, acting chief of the Europe Regional Medical Command Soldier and Family Support Services and Dr. Maria Crane, ERMC Traumatic Brain Injury program director.

The Army recently confirmed 128 suicides occurred in 2008, up from 115 in 2007. That figure is slightly under the civilian suicide rate. An additional 15 deaths are being investigated as suspected suicides.

“I don't think you embarrass people by telling them you are concerned about them and that you want to help,” Summerlin said. “We have stories from survivors of suicide attempts who have said that all they wanted to hear was one person asking them if they were all right.”

The panel answered questions from callers and from the AFN Web site ranging from how to recognize the signs of suicidal thoughts to how to intervene in the case of an actual suicide attempt.

“If I was with someone who I thought might be depressed to the point that they would do harm to themselves, I would not leave that person alone,” Connors said. He said a chaplain is on call at every military community in Europe and poised to intervene.

Connors said every military police station has the phone number of an on-call chaplain.

If you cannot get your buddy to seek help, Connors said, but are convinced he may harm himself, call the MPs, and stay with him until a chaplain arrives.

The panel also had advice for a teenage girl who called to ask what help was available for students like her.

“An inability to deal with stress can lead to depression, which leads to suicidal thoughts, Crane said. “If we can help someone handle those stresses, we can turn their mood change back to a positive change.”

She pointed out that the resources weren't limited to mental health. They include programs to help with alcoholism, indebtedness, marital discord and other issues that can bring stress.

“Those community resources are available to everyone – Soldiers, civilians and family members,” Summerlin stressed.

If someone does need help, their best choice could be their unit or community chaplain, Connors said.

“Army chaplains set aside their religion when someone comes to them for help,” Connors said. “Our first job is to listen. Often, that is all someone needs to get their life back on track.”

Cabrera said that, as a Soldier himself, he knows there is an Army mentality that a strong person should be able to “suck it up.” But, he said, that attitude isn't always helpful. He pointed out Soldiers wouldn't hesitate to go to a hospital if they were bleeding or had broken leg. Cabrera said mental health issues should be treated in the same way.

“Something happened to you as a result of what we do. You go out, you get it taken care of, and you go back to your job,” he explained. “It takes courage to step up and say you need help. It's not a sign of weakness. It's a sign of strength.”

The full program is available from the AFN Openline Web site at <http://www.afneurope.net/DynamicMenu/Radio/AFNOpenline/tabid/701/Default.aspx>

(Editor's note: Possible sidebar material follows.)

Negative changes in behavior that might indicate suicidal thoughts

- Sleeping difficulties
- Withdrawal from friends and society
- Sadness
- Chronic worry
- A sudden desire to “set affairs in order”
- Increased alcohol intake

Where to go for help

There are fourteen mental health treatment facilities placed throughout Europe. Behavioral health specialist there can give advice on what community resources are available, and help an individual begin to use the resources that fit their situation. A table of those locations and their phone numbers follows:

LOCATION	Military Phone	Civilian Phone
Ansbach/Katterbach Behavioral Health Clinic	468-7853	0981-183-853
Illesheim Behavioral Health Clinic	467-4993	098141-83-4993
Bamberg Health Clinic	469-8795	0951-300-8795
Baumholder Health Clinic	485-7411	06783-6-7411
Grafenwöhr/Vilseck Behavioral Health Clinic	476-2995	09662-83-2995
Hohenfels Social Work Service	466-4625/4284	09472-83-4625/4284
Heidelberg Behavioral Health Service	371-2680/2534	06221-17-2680/2534
Landstuhl Behavioral Health Division	486-7276/8366	06371-86-7276/8366
Mannheim Social Work Service	385-3118	0621-730-3118
Schweinfurt Behavioral Health Clinic	354-6231	09721-96-6231
SHAPE Social Work Service	423-5801	065-44-5801
Stuttgart Mental Health Clinic	431-2751	07031-15-2751
Vicenza Behavioral Health Clinic	634-7604	0444-71-7404
Wiesbaden Psychological Health Clinic	337-1750	0611-705-1750