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Getting men to talk about suicide

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Abstract
It may be hard to get men talking about their mental health, but that is just what we need to do.

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Getting men to talk about suicide

By Lorna Moxham and Christopher Patterson

It may well be hard to get men talking about their mental health, but that is just what we need to do. What we know is, compared to women, men consistently demonstrate a greater reluctance to seek help about their mental health. Men’s innate sense of masculinity, the idea that society expects them to be tough, self-reliant and able to take charge of situations, can be factors that inhibit them talking about how they feel.

Male suicide is a prominent public health concern. In 2013, 75% of Australians who died by suicide were men; with 1,885 (16.4 per 100) dying by this means.

Depression can lead to suicide; and front line care providers, such as nurses, are in a prime position to be alert to the signs of depression in men. Nurses will encounter men who have many of the known risk factors for depression and suicide.

Risk factors include, men living with chronic physical health problems, those who self-harm, misuse drugs and alcohol, and/or live with mental health problems. Nurses who are vigilant will also notice indicators such as frequent consultations, often purportedly to speak about physical health issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical signs of depression</th>
<th>Emotional signs of depression</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>persistent pain</td>
<td>thinking about death or suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loss of energy</td>
<td>feeling guilty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loss of sex drive</td>
<td>feeling angry or violent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>changes in appetite</td>
<td>losing interest in hobbies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lethargy or exhaustion</td>
<td>feeling indifferent or lacking interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>change in sleep patterns &amp; restlessness</td>
<td>feeling sad or nervous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alcohol and/or drug abuse</td>
<td>feeling alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>taking unnecessary risks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How can nurses actively help? Let men know you’re there to listen. Listen with empathy and hope. Help them gather information about and link with the many treatment and support options. Encourage
them to seek the support of family, friends and community. Encourage them to get enough sleep, exercise and eat well. Open discussion about how turning to alcohol or other drugs can actually make them feel worse. And most importantly – if you think a man is suicidal, ask him.

References: