A Web-Based Screening Tool Helps Gauge Suicide Risk

By Damian McNamara

From the annual meeting of the American Association of Suicidology

O R L A N D O — Primary care is a “ripe and rich environment” for youth suicide screening, and a new computer-based tool shows promise for identification of patients at risk, said Guy Diamond, Ph.D.

Dr. Diamond and his colleagues developed a Web-based behavioral health system that adolescents and young adults can complete in about 10 minutes before seeing their doctor. The 55-item core questions also assess depression, anxiety, trauma, and as relevant behaviors, such as drug use and risky sexual behavior. “We put suicide into a bigger context,” he said.

“The tool, which Dr. Diamond and his colleagues hope to launch in the fall, addresses everything the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend is covered during screening. Although all patients get the same questions asked in the same way, the time to take the screen varies from 9 to 14 minutes, depending on how many symptoms a patient endorses. Responses to the core items can trigger up to 41 additional questions.

The standardized format reduces provider bias, helps focus the clinical visit, and increases case identification, and practical guideline for including psychological/psychosocial/mental health issues in the practice of primary care pediatrics. There are many practical tools such as thinking about your referral patterns, being aware of what’s available in the community, and knowing the insurance sources.

“Sharing the responsibility for previsit data collection with the foster care agency increases the likelihood that adults with knowledge of the child’s mental health strengths and needs provide critical information.”

In the second chapter, “Strategies for Preparing a Primary Care Practice,” the task force recommends applying principles of the chronic care model to the care of children and youth with mental health problems. One critical element is a wide variety of partnerships to support and coordinate with primary care services.

“Keep in mind that what primary care clinicians will be able to find some action steps in the wide variety of recommendations that we made.”

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