

August 28, 2008

## MANDATORY SUICIDE RISK AND INTERVENTION TRAINING FOR VHA HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS

**1. PURPOSE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive presents policy and guidance for the implementation of mandatory training of appropriate VHA health care providers on suicide risk and intervention.

### 2. BACKGROUND

a. There are approximately 25 million veterans in the United States and 5 million veterans who receive care within VHA. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate suicide rates among men between the ages of 20 and 65 at approximately 22 per 100,000 persons per year. VHA mental health officials estimate 6,400 suicides per year among veterans, and 1,600 - 1,800 among veterans receiving health care from VHA.

b. To address this threat to the well being of the Nation's veterans, the Mental Health Strategic Plan (MHSP) of 2004 outlined plans to develop a system response for addressing the risk of suicide among veterans through mandatory education programs. VHA, through a coordinated effort between the Office of Mental Health, the Center for Excellence in Canandaigua, NY, and the VHA Employee Education System (EES), has developed a web-based learning program for VHA that educates appropriate health care providers on suicide risks and interventions, and incorporates the best practices for suicide prevention. *NOTE: Additional suicide prevention information will be provided during the annual "Suicide Prevention Week" activities.*

*NOTE: For purposes of this Directive, a VHA health care provider is defined as a full-time, part-time, or intermittent employee engaged in patient care as a Physician, Psychologist, Registered Nurse, Social Worker, Physician Assistant, Pharmacists, and Dentist, as well as any employee serving in the capacity of Case Manager or Vet Center Team Leader and Counselor.*

**3. POLICY:** It is VHA policy that all health care providers must complete the required suicide risk and intervention training module and pass the post-test no later than December 30, 2008. Subsequently, all new hires are required to complete this course within 90 days of entering the position.

### 4. ACTION

a. **Under Secretary for Health.** The Under Secretary of Health, or designee, is responsible for oversight of the Suicide Risk and Intervention Training Program.

**THIS VHA DIRECTIVE EXPIRES AUGUST 31, 2013**

## VHA DIRECTIVE 2008-051

August 28, 2008

b. **Office of Mental Health Services (OMHS)**. The OMHS is responsible for:

(1) Development, evolution, management, and implementation of the ongoing suicide risk and intervention training.

(2) Working collaboratively with EES to produce the training module.

(3) Reporting national compliance annually to the Office of Patient Care Services as part of the tracking of the overall implementation of the MHSP.

c. **VHA Employee Education System**. EES is responsible for:

(1) The production of training modules in direct collaboration with OHMS and field-based subject matter experts for the content.

(2) The development and maintenance of the web-based training with completion reports available through the Learning Management System (LMS). *NOTE: Information regarding the course is available at <http://vaww.ees.lrn.va.gov/Site/support/5888/>.*

d. **Veterans Integrated Network (VISN) Director**. Each VISN Director is responsible for ensuring training of all health care providers within their area of responsibility.

e. **Facility Director**. The Facility Director is responsible for ensuring:

(1) Local assignment of this web-based training course to appropriate staff through the LMS. *NOTE: Trainees are exempt from the mandatory requirement, but are encouraged to complete the training module as part of their overall educational experience within VHA.*

(2) Completions of this web-based training course are tracked.

f. **Vet Center Regional Managers**. The Vet Center Regional Managers are responsible for ensuring training of all health care providers within their area of responsibility.

**5. REFERENCES:** None.

**6. FOLLOW-UP RESPONSIBILITIES:** OMHS (116) is responsible for the contents of this Directive. Questions may be addressed to OMHS at (202) 461-7350.

**7. RESCISSIONS:** None. This VHA Directive expires August 31, 2013.

Michael J. Kussman, MD, MS, MACP  
Under Secretary for Health

**DISTRIBUTION:** CO: E-mailed 8/29/08  
FLD: VISN, MA, DO, OC, OCRO, and 200 E-mailed x8/29/08