

Chapter 44 Prevention of Suicide

Update on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a severe anxiety disorder caused by psychological trauma involving the threat of death or severe harm to oneself or to someone else. Any individual may develop PTSD after experiencing or witnessing interpersonal violence (rape, assault, torture, acts of war) or other life-threatening events (accidents, natural disasters) that are associated with terror and shock. Drug addiction, life threatening illnesses and medical complications may also predispose to PTSD. Diagnostic symptoms of PTSD include nightmares and flashbacks of the precipitating event, avoidance of thinking about the event, and persistent stress and anxiety.

Recent epidemiologic investigations of war veterans and soldiers show that PTSD increases the risk of suicidal ideation and suicide. In a case control study, Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans with PTSD were found to be 4.5 times more likely to manifest suicide ideation than veterans without PTSD (Jakupcak *et al.*, 2009). In a longitudinal study of US Army soldiers, most of whom were deployed to combat zones in Iraq or Afghanistan, the suicide rate increased more than 80% (from 12 to 22 per 100,000) during 2004-2008 in parallel with increased rates of PTSD and other mental disorders which rose from 116 to 216 per 1,000 person-years during the same time frame (Bachynski *et al.*, 2011). Treatment of PTSD involves counseling and education to help patients confront fears and emotional responses to the traumatic event and medications to alleviate anxiety and stress.

References

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