

Awareness reduces risk of suicide

By Maggie Dunning
Staff reporter

A conversation. That is what people are engaging in when it comes to Robin Williams' suicide and suicide in general.

Today is Suicide Prevention Day, a day dedicated to promote worldwide action in preventing suicides, and it is the perfect time to start that conversation.

Suicide prevention is an important topic for those in higher education to discuss because it is a common problem on campuses.

There are resources available at Southwestern to make students successful in this regard.

One of those resources is Mary Ann Smith, wellness coordinator.

"She is a licensed social worker and LMSW. She's there to talk to students," said Sarah Hallinan, director of residence life.

Smith explained that her position at the school is not to diagnose students, she's just someone here they can come to if they feel the need to talk to someone is

confidence.

"This position does not diagnose mental health issues where a psychologist would be able to do this and provide treatment for specific mental health diagnosis," said Smith.

"It's just important for people who are struggling with mental health, with depression, with mental illness, to have support," said Hallinan.

One way students can show their support is to listen and tell someone what's going on.

"Listening, just being there. Noticing a serious change and telling a campus official about it can help the student in trouble get the help that they need," said Smith.

Two things students should be on the lookout for if they are concerned that a friend, roommate, or classmate is depressed are a change in behavior and sleeping habits.

"If you see a change in sleeping, eating habits things like that, or not doing things they usually like to do. Those are some com-

mon signs (of depression)," Hallinan said.

The higher education world has also felt a push to think of new ways to help support students with mental health issues.

"I think there is a big pressure now to work with students and to make sure you're helping students be successful," said Hallinan.

A way in which higher academic institutions are helping students be successful is no longer treating attempted suicide as a student conduct issue and instead working with students to create a success plan.

"In the past a student could get kicked out of school for attempting suicide because of the behavior of self-harm. Now that it is protected under ADA, schools are really working with students to make them successful," said Hallinan.

One thing students need when struggling with suicidal thoughts is support.

"You can go to your hall staff

person, so an RA or RD, and they can help direct you to the right resources," said Hallinan.

"Suicidal thoughts should never be taken for granted and should always be reported for the individual to receive help," said Smith.

"If they (students) need to have a referral, she can help refer them to a professional," said Hallinan.

The Suicide Prevention Center also reported, "Regarding suicidal thoughts, 18 percent of undergraduate students have seriously considered attempting suicide in their lifetimes."

"Many campus professionals dedicated to suicide prevention and mental health promotion often refer to suicide as the second leading cause of death among college students," reports www.sprc.org.

The toll free suicide hotline number is 800.273.8255.

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Facts about suicide:

- There are an estimated 12 attempted suicides for every one suicide death.
- In 2009, there were an estimated 374,486 people with self-inflicted injuries are treated in emergency departments. The number increased to 464,995 in 2010 and 487,770 in 2011.
- The estimated number of people hospitalized for self-inflicted injuries increased from 155,000 in 2009 to 224,000 in 2011.
- There are far more suicides each year than homicides. In fact, in from 2008 - 2010, the number of suicides has been more than twice that of homicides.
- In 2010, more than 38,000 people died by suicide.

Source: www.sprc.org.

Signs of Suicide

1. Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
2. Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
3. Talking about being a burden to others
4. Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
5. Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
6. Sleeping too little or too much
7. Withdrawing or feeling isolated
8. Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
9. Displaying extreme mood swings
10. Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself
11. Looking for a way to kill oneself

Source: MARY ANN SMITH, WELLNESS COORDINATOR