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Presentation

The impact of a suicide patrol on suicides by jumping at Beachy Head, Sussex

Speaker

Dr Saleema Durgahee, East Brighton Community Mental Health Team, Brighton General Hospital

Abstract

Suicide continues to be a major public health issue with around 5000 people taking their own lives in England each year. The UK Government's white paper, 'Saving Lives: Our Healthier nation' pledged to reduce the death rate from suicide and undetermined injury by at least a fifth by 2010.

Jumping from a height is an uncommon method, accounting for 5 per cent of all suicides. Beachy Head (BH) has gained such notoriety, with a conservative estimate of on average 20 deaths per year. Two studies have reviewed the rates of suicide at Beachy Head. Isaacs & Bennett reported an overall increase in deaths at Beachy Head but found there were no suicides for almost six months during the foot and mouth crisis.

Prevention strategies are key to reducing suicides and include restricting access and dedicated patrol teams. Anecdotal evidence report reductions in suicides at the Golden Gate bridge, where suicide patrol officers have been in place since 1996. Human contact may be an important factor in preventing suicide jumps, but research to substantiate such claims is lacking.

The Beachy Head Chaplaincy (BHC), a voluntary Christian organisation, has been patrolling the Sussex cliffs since August 2004, to intercept and dissuade potential jumpers. To date, there have not been any studies evaluating the impact of a suicide patrol as a suicide prevention strategy.

The objectives of this study are:

- To examine the rates of suicide by jumping at Beachy Head from 1987 to 2011 (retrospective, observational, 'before and after' study) and evaluate whether the suicide patrol has reduced overall suicide rates.
- Audio-recordings of nine semi-structured interviews with Beachy Head chaplains using a phenomenological approach completed to capture their 'lived experience' of volunteering. Thematic analysis was used and a

personal reflective account shadowing the team is included.

Ethical Approval was granted by BSMS Research Governance & Ethics Committee in January 2012. The study began in August 2012.