

The Arcata Eye

Question, Persuade and Refer

HUMBOLDT —Every 15 minutes, someone in the United States dies by suicide, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

A new report released by the CDC finds that for every person who dies, there are many more who think about, plan or attempt suicide.

A Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Public Health Branch training program called "Question, Persuade and Refer" (QPR) is helping to break down the stigma surrounding suicide and, at the same time, is teaching community members about the warning signs of suicide and about what to do if someone they come in contact with is exhibiting these behaviors.

"Suicide is a community problem," said DHHS Public Health Branch Director Susan Buckley. "We have to work together as a community to find a solution."

The CDC study, released in late October, is the first to present state-by-state data specifically focused on suicidal thoughts and behavior among U.S. adults. It is based on findings from the 2008-2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

The CDC report reveals that suicidal thoughts and behaviors vary broadly by region. Of the 92,264 people polled, the number of adults who said they had had serious thoughts of suicide ranges from 1 in 50 in Georgia (2.1 percent) to 1 in 15 in Utah (6.8 percent). For suicide attempts, the range is from 1 in 1,000 adults in Delaware and Georgia (0.1 percent) to 1 in 67 in Rhode Island (1.5 percent).

According to the CDC, in California, 1 in 29 adults (3.4 percent) surveyed said they had seriously thought about suicide. One in 111 (0.9 percent) reported that they had gone on to create a suicide plan and 1 in 250 (0.4 percent) of the adults questioned said they had attempted suicide.

According to the CDC, suicide rates are consistently higher in the western states than other areas around the country. The "County Health Status Profiles 2010" report, put out by the California Department of Public Health every year, shows that the 2010 suicide rate in Humboldt County was 24.8 suicides per 100,000 persons, which is comparable to other small rural counties.

"Suicide is a tragedy for individuals, families and communities," said Dr. Thomas M. Frieden, CDC director. "This new report by the CDC highlights that we have opportunities to intervene before someone dies by suicide. Most people are uncomfortable talking about suicide, but this is not a problem to shroud in secrecy."

Humboldt County's QPR training is designed to help raise awareness about warning signs around suicide. A simple educational program, QPR teaches ordinary citizens how to recognize a person at risk. The program is funded by Mental Health Services Act-Prevention and Early Intervention Suicide Prevention.

"The idea behind this training is to empower people to reach out and assist someone who may be thinking about suicide," said Kris Huschle, a Public Health Branch health education specialist who presents QPR trainings locally.

Just as people trained in CPR help save thousands of lives each year, she said, people trained in QPR can save lives, too.

"In CPR, the public is educated about the classic signs of a heart attack and how to respond," Huschle said. "In QPR, the public is educated about the warning signs of a suicide crisis — expressions of hopelessness, depression, giving away prized possessions, talking of suicide, securing lethal means — and how they can respond."

To date, more than one million Americans have been trained in QPR by certified QPR instructors like Huschle. About 500 people have been trained in Humboldt County since the program started in November 2009.

QPR training is available to anyone in the community. For more information about scheduling a QPR training for your workplace, organization or group, call Huschle at 441-5554. The training session runs about 90 minutes, although Huschle can present a shorter or longer program depending on a group's specific needs and interests. Early morning, evening and weekend presentations can be arranged.

"This is a community program and the community doesn't always operate on an 8 to 5 schedule, so I am available to give presentations at different times," Huschle said. "The most important thing here is to get the word out. We can all make a difference and through the QPR training, possibly save someone's life."