

Magellan Seeks to Reduce Suicide Deaths Through Groundbreaking Prevention Initiative

Pilot Program Underway in Maricopa County, Arizona

On the heels of Mental Illness Awareness Week, clinical leaders from Magellan Health Services, Inc., (NASDAQ:MGLN) an industry leader in behavioral health care management, are now gathering to discuss a variety of innovative solutions for addressing the unique needs and improving outcomes of individuals with mental illnesses. Among the items on the agenda is a groundbreaking clinical initiative that aims to reduce suicide deaths—a topic that has been neglected by many in the mental health industry due, in large part, to the stigma attached to it.

“It’s a little known fact that more Americans end their lives by suicide each year than die from prostate cancer or Parkinson’s disease, and the rate for individuals with serious mental illness is six times higher than the general population,” said David W. Covington, LPC, MBA, chief of adult services for Magellan Health Services of Arizona, who also serves on the executive committee of the National Alliance for Suicide Prevention. “Despite the steady number of suicides—which total about 35,000 in the U.S. each year—most mental health providers across the country have not made suicide prevention part of their core mission and they don’t have comprehensive training and intervention programs in place to address this growing issue.”

Magellan is leading the industry in changing this unfortunate reality through its Suicide Prevention and Intervention Initiative, which equips behavioral health care staff with the skills, knowledge, attitudes and support to more effectively intervene and engage with those who are at risk of suicide. “This is an unmet need that exists throughout the country, but specifically in the public sector community mental health system,” explained Covington, who will be giving the first formal presentation on the initiative at Magellan’s 2010 National Behavioral Health Clinical Excellence Conference being held Oct. 12 -14 in Atlanta. “The core of the industry’s behavioral health workforce is not trained in engaging and collaborating with people at risk for suicide. As a result, many professionals avoid the topic of suicide and are quick to refer those who mention it to law enforcement and emergency departments, often resulting in intrusive and costly hospitalizations.”

In November of 2009, Magellan Health Services of Arizona engaged a steering committee to tackle this challenge in Maricopa County, Arizona, where it serves as the Regional Behavioral Health Authority (RBHA), the county’s public sector community mental health system. The committee brought together mental health providers, policymakers, law enforcement officials and opinion leaders—all committed to reducing suicide deaths among the 80,000 individuals enrolled in RBHA services in the county.

As a first step, Magellan surveyed nearly 1,700 case managers, clinicians, nurses and physicians in the county to create a baseline assessment of their confidence and skills in engaging in suicide prevention and intervention with those at risk. Fewer than half of respondents felt they had the training, skills and supports to appropriately assist

individuals with a suicidal desire or intent. Based on this, the committee established a goal to train 2,000 mental health workers in 2010.

Since then, more than 1,200 caregivers have gone through Living Works' Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training—known as ASIST—a two-day nationally recognized training program that has repeatedly been shown to dramatically improve the self-confidence of mental health workers engaging with those at risk of suicide. Magellan has invested in creating more than 30 master trainers of ASIST in community providers, and the committee expects to achieve its goal.

“The most important first step is to be able to talk openly and directly about suicide. ASIST is a proven, evidence-based training that empowers staff not only to better detect and react to the warning signs of suicide, but also to make connections with those who may need help but may have difficulty talking about their suicidal thoughts,” Covington said. “By ensuring that all community health center staff is trained to help prevent the immediate risk of suicide, we create a seamless safety net that should ultimately lead to a reduction in suicide rates among those at risk.”

In addition to ASIST training in Maricopa County, Magellan has been sponsoring quarterly educational webinars focused on the latest research on suicide and meets regularly with the volunteer steering committee to share successes and identify opportunities. Response from community mental health workers has been extremely positive and Magellan is now making plans to implement the program nationwide.

About Magellan: Headquartered in Avon, Conn., Magellan Health Services, Inc., is a leading specialty health care management organization with expertise in managing behavioral health, radiology and specialty pharmaceuticals, as well as public sector pharmacy benefits programs. Magellan delivers innovative solutions to improve quality outcomes and optimize the cost of care for those we serve. Magellan's customers include health plans, employers and government agencies, serving nearly 60 million people nationwide in our behavioral and radiology benefits lines, more than 40 payors in our specialty pharmaceutical benefits segment, and 25 states and the District of Columbia in our Medicaid Administration segment. For more information, visit www.MagellanHealth.com.

<http://www.kansascity.com/2010/10/13/2310557/magellan-seeks-to-reduce-suicide.html>