May is Mental Health Awareness month and Optum is focusing part of its attention this year on suicide awareness. Although the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S., suicide is a relatively uncommon but catastrophic event that is most often associated with unrecognized and unaddressed, treatable mental health disorders. Optum is working to raise awareness of suicide as a tragically permanent response to a temporary problem for which there are always effective solutions and helpful resources. Talking about and raising awareness of suicide, in the proper context, does not increase the risk of occurrence. In fact, an open, caring dialog with those who may be contemplating suicide along with encouragement to seek the counsel of trusted people or professionals is a proven way to reduce risk.

As part of Optum’s work to destigmatize mental health issues and thus encourage those coping with these treatable health conditions to reach out for ready assistance, we are involved with the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, a public/private partnership of more than 250 organizations working to advance the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (NSSP) in the U.S. and reduce the annual suicide rate 20% by 2025. We strive to promote positive messaging that reduces the risk and incidence of suicide by encouraging and better helping those who may be considering suicide to find effective help. Our liveandworkwell.com member portal, which includes information on reducing stigma and a wealth of general mental health resources, will highlight this month specific strategies and effective resources for those who may be contemplating suicide (see next page for details.)

This year the topic of suicide has been further spotlighted by the widely watched and discussed Netflix series “13 Reasons Why” which depicts the circumstances surrounding the fictional suicide of a teenage girl. Valuably, the show has focused needed attention on suicide and created a forum for discussion, particularly with regard to how assault, bullying, shaming and other mistreatment creates vulnerability as well as how the support of friends, family and others can potentially mitigate risk. Moreover, the show may raise awareness of warning signs and opportunities where even simple interventions like supportive listening can change the outcome.

That said, the subject matter of the show is obviously difficult. We encourage those who watch or have watched the show not to experience it in isolation, but to use it as a means of connection and mutual exploration that can reemphasize the important message that suicide is complex and not a simple response to single events no matter how significant. Few people experiencing catastrophic events die by suicide. The vast majority find effective support, coping strategies, and when necessary professional assistance to deal with treatable mental disorders most often associated with suicide. Any discussion should emphasize that suicide is not romantic, heroic, nor effective revenge.
Suicide Prevention Resources on Live and Work Well

Login to www.liveandworkwell.com, select “Suicide Prevention” under the Crisis Support tab.

- Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-TALK
- Topical Articles:
  - Tips on How to be Helpful to Someone Threatening Suicide
  - What Helps and What Hurts
  - Signs of Suicide: How to Help
  - Suicide and Suicidal Thoughts
  - What to Do if You are Thinking About Suicide
  - When Someone You Know May Be at Risk for Suicide
  - When a Service Member May be at Risk for Suicide
- Guides and Toolkits:
  - Recovery, Resiliency and Empowerment Tools
  - Family Recovery and Resiliency Tools
  - Understanding Depression: Learning the Facts
  - Suicidal Thoughts or Threats
  - Suicide Prevention Helpguide
- Courses:
  - Mental Health First Aid – Free Training
  - Suicide Prevention Education Program
- Self-Help Resources:
  - The Balanced Mind Foundation. Offers family resources for kids with mood disorders.
  - The Trevor Project. The leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth.
  - It Gets Better Project. This resource provides videos and support for those youth who can’t picture what their lives might be like as openly gay adults.
- My Healthy Family:
  - The award-winning “Kids Health” content from the Nemours Foundation provides educational information written specifically to parents of teens and to teens themselves, regarding suicide prevention. Find it under Popular Tools on the member home page of liveandworkwell.com.

Additional Resources
- Talking Points for Educators - The website of the National Association of School Psychologists provides information and additional links that may be helpful with regard to discussion of the “13 Reasons Why” series.
- National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention – The NASP website has a wealth of information regarding positive communications regarding suicide.

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