**INITIAL MANAGEMENT OF PATIENT AT RISK FOR SUICIDE**

- Close follow-up after discharge from acute care setting
- Determine level of risk for suicide attempt
- Evaluate patients at intermediate and high risk for suicide
- Assess for suicidal ideation, intent, and behavior

**VA/DOD CLINICAL PRACTICE GUIDELINE**

- Problem-solving therapy (PST) addressing the risk for reducing the risk for repeated self-directed violence: co-occurring mental disorders to reduce the risk of suicide by behavioral health providers

**KEY ELEMENTS OF THE SUICIDE RISK GUIDELINE**

1. **Patients at Risk for Suicide**
2. **Algorithm A**
3. **Table 2** Risk Factors
4. **Table 4** Level of Risk for Suicide

---

**Algorithm A:** Assessment & Management in Primary Care

- **ASSESSMENT AND DETERMINATION OF RISK**
  - Identify warning signs for suicide risk
  - Assess for suicidal ideation, intent, and behavior
  - Assess for protective factors affecting suicide risk
  - Evaluate patients at intermediate and high risk for suicide
  - Risk factors for suicide

- **INITIAL MANAGEMENT OF PATIENT AT RISK FOR SUICIDE**
  - Determine immediate risk for suicide
  - Determine appropriate setting of care
  - Determine the level of risk for suicide

- **Assessment & Management in Primary Care**
  - Document risk assessment
  - Limit access to lethal means
  - Document risk assessment
  - Continue monitoring patient status

- **Other Risk Factors**
  - **Physical Health**
  - **Psychological**
  - **Sociocultural**
  - **Military-Specific**

- **TREATMENT**
  - **Counseling**
  - **Medication**
  - **Social Support**
  - **Education**

- **TABLE 5**

---

**Table 2 Risk Factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medical Conditions</th>
<th>Mental Disorders</th>
<th>Social Factors</th>
<th>Psychological Factors</th>
<th>Psychosocial/Behavioral Factors</th>
<th>MILITARY-SPECIFIC</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to health care</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to means</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to treatment</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance use</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic illness</td>
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<td>Other medical conditions</td>
<td>-</td>
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**Table 4 Level of Risk for Suicide**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Risk</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Risk</td>
<td>- Limited risk factors for suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Risk</td>
<td>- Moderate risk factors for suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Risk</td>
<td>- High risk factors for suicide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Specifics**

- **Suicidal Ideation**
  - Current suicidal ideation or plan
  - Previous suicidal ideation or plan
  - Previous suicide attempt
  - Suicide ideation or plan as part of a crisis

- **Previous Suicide Attempts**
  - Number of prior suicide attempts
  - Method of prior suicide attempts
  - Recency of prior suicide attempts

- **Recurrent Suicidal Ideation**
  - Recurrent suicidal ideation or plan
  - Recurrent suicide attempts

**Footnotes**

- †††
  - Evidence of suicidal behavior warning signs in the context of denial of ideation should call for concern
  - Determination of risk factors for suicide
  - Modified for the military population

- ††
  - Risk factors for suicide
  - Risk factors for suicide

**References**

- Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Care of Adults Who Attempted Suicide: Severe Mental Illnesses (2011)
- Veterans Health Administration
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

**Comments**

- Department of Veterans Affairs

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Risk</td>
<td>- No previous suicide attempts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Risk</td>
<td>- One or two previous suicide attempts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Risk</td>
<td>- Three or more previous suicide attempts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Undetermined</td>
<td>- Clinical judgment</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factors</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>- <strong>Physical Health</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- <strong>Psychological</strong></td>
<td>- Access to means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>Social Factors</strong></td>
<td>- Access to treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- <strong>Military-Specific</strong></td>
<td>- Substance use</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3**

- **Process of Risk Assessment**
  - Risk assessment process
  - Risk assessment process
  - Risk assessment process

**Figure 4**

- **Risk Assessment Algorithm**
  - Risk assessment algorithm
  - Risk assessment algorithm
  - Risk assessment algorithm

**Figure 5**

- **Risk Assessment Form**
  - Risk assessment form
  - Risk assessment form
  - Risk assessment form

---

**Table 3**

<table>
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<td>- Moderate risk factors for suicide</td>
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<td>High Risk</td>
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**Table 4**

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<td>- Moderate risk factors for suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Risk</td>
<td>- High risk factors for suicide</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6**

- **Suicide Risk Assessment**
  - Suicide risk assessment
  - Suicide risk assessment
  - Suicide risk assessment
TABLE 5: Appropriate Action in Primary Care

**High Acute Risk**
- Maintain direct observational control of the patient until patient is considered safe
- Immediate transfer to an emergency department hospital psychiatric service, if available
- Do not leave the patient unattended
- Contact Behavioral Health provider to complete suicide risk assessment and triage
- **Low Acute Risk**
- Continue monitoring patient status and consider consultation with a Behavioral Health provider
- Continue routine care
- Treat mental health and medical conditions
- Modify/Optimize pharmacotherapy of the underlying disorder to treat mental health and medical conditions
- Reassess risk for suicide in follow-up visits

**Intermediate Acute Risk**
- Consider initiating suicide-prevention measures
- Monitor Safety Plan
- Monitor and reassess suicide risk
- Consider involuntary psychiatric hospitalization
- **Low Acute Risk**
- Continue routine care
- Treat mental health and medical conditions
- Modify/Optimize pharmacotherapy of the underlying disorder to treat mental health and medical conditions
- Reassess risk for suicide in follow-up visits

**Low Acute Risk**
- Continue routine care
- Treat mental health and medical conditions
- Modify/Optimize pharmacotherapy of the underlying disorder to treat mental health and medical conditions
- Reassess risk for suicide in follow-up visits

**Under Risk**
- Patient should be discharged home with a plan for follow-up
- Patient is being monitored for suicide risk
- Monitor and reassess suicide risk
- Continue routine care

**Recovery: Risk Assessment and Management of Suicidal Risk**

**Component of Safety Plan**
- The Safety Plan is a personal, signed list of steps that patients use to prevent a future suicide attempt
- Patients are instructed to recognize when they are at risk and to adapt the Safety Plan as needed to respond to levels of risk

**Safety Plan**
- **Includes**
  - Monitoring suicide preparatory behavior
  - Risk assessment and interventions
  - Reinforcing successful self-care

**Table 6: Discharge to Less Restrictive Level of Care**

**Appropriate Action**
- Assess patient’s capacity to manage safety risks
- Complete psychosocial evaluation
- Continue monitoring patient status and consider consultation with a Behavioral Health provider

**Table 7: Discharge Planning**

**Table 8: Safety Planning**

**Table 9: Interventions to Improve Adherence**

**Table 10: Risk Reduction in Primary Care**

**Table 11: Interventions to Improve Adherence**

**Table 12: Definitions**

**Suicide Death**
- The act of committing suicide
- The death of a person who commits suicide

**Suicide Attempt**
- A behavior that is deliberate and directed towards the reduction of one’s life
- The act of taking one’s own life

**Suicidality**
- The presence of suicidal ideation, thought, or behavior
- The experience of thoughts, plans, or behaviors that are directed towards the reduction of one’s life

**Suicidal Ideation**
- The experience of thoughts, plans, or behaviors that are directed towards the reduction of one’s life
- The presence of thoughts, plans, or behaviors that are directed towards the reduction of one’s life

**Suicide Risk**
- The presence of thoughts, plans, or behaviors that are directed towards the reduction of one’s life
- The presence of thoughts, plans, or behaviors that are directed towards the reduction of one’s life

**Suicide Risk Assessment**
- The process of identifying and evaluating the presence of thoughts, plans, or behaviors that are directed towards the reduction of one’s life
- The process of identifying and evaluating the presence of thoughts, plans, or behaviors that are directed towards the reduction of one’s life