

the hub

[hub (hub) noun: A shared point of focus, interest or activity for a community or organisation.]

WORLD SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY

I write this 'Hub' late in August – traditionally the most difficult time of year for emergency departments and ambulance delays. Hopefully, by the time you read this September issue of Sirens, signs of improvement will be evident, although there are always challenges for us. I would like to acknowledge the efforts of those involved in managing a tough year for access block.

This month I want to draw attention to a sensitive issue – suicide. I do so for two reasons: World Suicide Prevention Day will be held on 10 September and the State Coroner has indicated that she will hand down recommendations in early September, into the tragic deaths of paramedic Trent Speering and his mother, Monica in 2008.

Many of us know someone who has taken their own life. People involved in such situations often worry that there may have been early signs that went unnoticed. Of course it is easier with hindsight to look back and see a pattern of at-risk behaviours. World Suicide Prevention Day aims to raise awareness of the risk of suicide and increase the chances of early identification of such behaviours.

Earlier this year I established the 'The Wellbeing and Resilience Advisory Panel' which aims to:

- > enhance emotional and psychological support for staff;
- > develop strategies to increase the emotional resilience of staff;
- > enhance capacity of the organisation to respond to concerns about employees' mental health, including those who may be at-risk of self-harm and suicide;
- > build a deeper understanding of evidence-based practice in this area to inform future strategies; and,
- > develop a more open, proactive and informed approach to the early identification of warning signs of risk to psychological wellbeing, and the capacity to respond appropriately to them.

This expert Panel comprises the Chief Psychiatrist for NSW, a representative from the Centre for Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Branch in NSW Health, the General Managers for Operations and Corporate Services, and our Manager, Healthy Workplace Strategies. Additional expertise is also being co-opted.

The Panel will also consider relevant coronial recommendations. A workplan for the Panel is being developed and will soon be available on our intranet, along with minutes of meetings.

This work will become an important addition to the range of staff support services that are already available. I hope that in time, discussion of mental health and wellbeing amongst staff will become as open as discussions on physical injuries and risks. At present, even though the stressful nature of ambulance work means that paramedics can be at a higher than average risk of developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (a known factor in suicide risk), the topic remains a difficult discussion for us.

As always, you can contact me with any queries or feedback about your current work experiences at askgreg@ambulance.nsw.gov.au

Have a good September.

Greg Rochford
Chief Executive

**To learn more about World Suicide Prevention Awareness Day, please go to the official website: www.iasp.info*