

EMBARGOED UNTILL 12 NOON ON TUESDAY 26th APRIL

26th April 2016

HSE MEDIA RELEASE

LAUNCH OF REPORT ON: A STUDY OF UNTIMELY SUDDEN DEATHS AND PEOPLE WHO TOOK THEIR LIVES WHILE IN THE CARE OF THE DONEGAL MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE

Today Tuesday, 26th of April, marked the launch of a report on a study that examined untimely sudden deaths and those who took their lives while in the care of the Donegal Mental Health Service (DMHS) between October 2011 to May 2015.

The launch took place at Education Centre, St Conal's Hospital, Letterkenny and was attended by representatives from the HSE, the community and voluntary sector and various other interested parties.

This study was commissioned by the DMHS and funded by the National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP). It was conducted by the National Suicide Research Foundation (NSRF) and led by Professor Ella Arensman, Dr Colette Corry and Ms Eileen Williamson.

The study came about following concern within DMHS about the sudden and untimely deaths of a number of service users. The main aim of the study was to identify risk factors associated with sudden unexpected deaths and suicides which would aid the DMHS in the care and treatment of service users who are at risk of suicide or sudden unexpected death.

A total of 34 deaths were included in the study, and 24 family informant interviews took place. The study involved obtaining data from multiple sources of information including clinical records, coroner's records and information from healthcare professionals who had been in contact with the deceased prior to death. Most importantly, interviews were conducted with the next of kin to obtain information on their deceased family member, including their experiences of the treatment received, and to ensure that families were aware of support services available. In addition, a review of media reporting during the time of the study was also conducted.

The study including a summary report can be found at the following site.

www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/Mental_Health_Services/NOSP/Research/reports/

The summary report includes an outline of the key findings and recommendations of the study. The findings revealed that no single factor dominated the cases examined. Each case had a complexity which underlined that the recommendations and actions needed a multifaceted and collaborative approach.

Speaking at the launch Dr Clifford Hayley, Executive Clinical Director of DMHS stated *"Unexpected tragic events with adverse outcomes present a huge challenge to individuals, health services, families and communities who are striving to do their best in stressful circumstances. This research has examined in depth and in detail those tragic circumstances that no-one personally or professionally ever wishes to face. We will continue to act upon the recommendations to ensure they are implemented fully. Thus enabling the DMHS to enhance and improve the supports offered to families bereaved, ultimately improving the prevention and treatment programmes that we offer"*.

The DMHS has commenced implementing the following actions as a matter of priority:

- A series of staff briefing sessions have taken place to inform staff of the findings and recommended actions from the study and to ensure their support and commitment in the implementation.
- A comprehensive training package will include additional training in suicide risk assessment which will be tailored specifically to experience and level of expertise in both community and in-patient settings. This will address the complexities of treating service users with dual diagnosis and facilitate a collaborative, multi-agency approach.
- An Information pack for families is being developed to address concerns identified by family members.
- Contact with and support for bereaved families will be intensified as a matter of priority.

Gerry Raleigh from the NOSP addressed the launch stating *'This study is an important initiative by a mental health service determined to learn how it can improve service delivery to prevent suicide. The study provides valuable learning that could be applied in other mental health service settings throughout Ireland. This study supports Connecting for life Donegal, the local suicide prevention plan and outlines priority actions to implement a key goal of the plan which is to ensure safe and high quality services for people vulnerable to suicide'* .

According to Prof Ella Arensman of the NSRF who led the study and is president of the International Association of Suicide Prevention (IASP), *'This report offers a unique opportunity to obtain greater insight into suicide among people who were in the care of the DMHS. This is mainly due to the completeness of information, obtained from multiple sources including clinical records, family informant interviews, Coroners' records, and questionnaires from health care professionals. Therefore, this report will make a difference in terms of increasing awareness, improving assessment and management of people at risk of suicidal behaviour in a mental health service setting'* .

The DMHS would like to sincerely thank all the family members who shared their personal experiences to help us achieving greater understanding about people whose untimely deaths occurred while they were users of mental health services.

There were a number of new initiatives implemented to address the prevention of suicide within the service whilst the study was taking place. Whilst these measures are not directly emerging from the research they are significant. They include:

- The development of *Connecting for Life Donegal* suicide prevention action plan which represents a whole of society approach to reducing deaths by suicide and is already in its first year of implementation.
- The appointment of two self-harm nurses in the Emergency Department of Letterkenny University hospital to ensure risk assessment and follow-up with all patients presenting with self-harm.
- The appointment of two Suicide Crisis Assessment Nurses offering consultation and assessment to individuals in crisis presenting to GPs.
- The establishment of a Suicide Family Liaison Service through Console to ensure immediate support to families and individuals in the aftermath of a suicide death of a family member.
- Training in self-harm awareness has been delivered to mental health and primary care staff.

Ends

Notes to Editors

If you or someone you care for is experiencing mental health difficulties, the following are services that you can contact.

Hospital Emergency Services - Letterkenny University Hospital Emergency Department

Call (074) 91 23595. Hours: 24 Hours, 7 days a week

Your own Doctor - You can make an appointment with your local GP during office hours, Monday- Friday.

During evenings, nights or weekends you can contact an out of hours GP service.

NoWDOC - Call 1850 400 911. Hours: 6pm- 8am, 7 days a week

HSE Donegal mental health services available include: The local adult community mental health team based in Letterkenny, Donegal town, Buncrana and Dungloe. The Old Age Psychiatry service is available to adults over 65yrs. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service has an outreach clinic in Buncrana and provides a mental health service to children and young people under 18yrs. Referral to all three services is through the family doctor who can also refer medical card holders to the HSE Primary Care Counselling Service.

The HSE also provides Psychology and Bereavement Counselling Services, both contactable at (07491 04641). Both services accept self referrals. Counselling is available to adults over the age of 18yrs who are medical card holders.

The HSE also supports the JIGSAW service which is available to any young person aged between 15 yrs and 25yrs who has any concern about their mental wellbeing. JIGSAW can be contacted at 0749726920. JIGSAW has outreach bases in Donegal Town, Ballyshannon, Buncrana and Carndonagh.

Listening Services – Non judgemental, confidential support is available 24/7 on the following free phone services.

Samaritans - Call 116 123 Hours: 24 Hours, 7 days a week

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Childline - Call 1800 66 66 66 Hours: 24 Hours, 7 days a week

Text TALK to 50101 Hours: 10am-4am, 7 days a week

Webchat at www.childline.ie Hours: 10am-4pm, 7 days a week

www.mentalhealth.ie: An online support and information service

Other Voluntary Organisations that can offer support include: Grow (Letterkenny office 074 9161628), Aware (Buncrana office 074 9320791)

People may also find it useful to access www.yourmentalhealth.ie for information on mental health

Media Guidelines - Samaritans and IAS Media guidelines for reporting suicide in Ireland can be downloaded at the following web address

<http://www.samaritans.org/your-community/samaritans-work-ireland/media-guidelines-ireland>

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