

Embedding Suicide Awareness and Responses Training within a General Hospital; A journey from opportunistic to mandatory sessions

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Introduction

Liaison teams have an important role in teaching and training (RCP, 2014). Embedding any mental health or substance misuse training within a general hospital is challenging and none more so than suicide awareness and prevention. Through a step by step approach taken over 12 months, the Liaison Team based at the Royal Derby hospital have successfully embedded and raised the profile of suicide awareness and responses training within the acute trust, delivering around 20 suicide awareness training sessions in 2016.

Delivering such training to Acute staff can have a positive impact on attitudes and on confidence in managing patients with suicidal thoughts/behaviour who present to a general hospital. This ultimately improves patient care and improves patient experience.

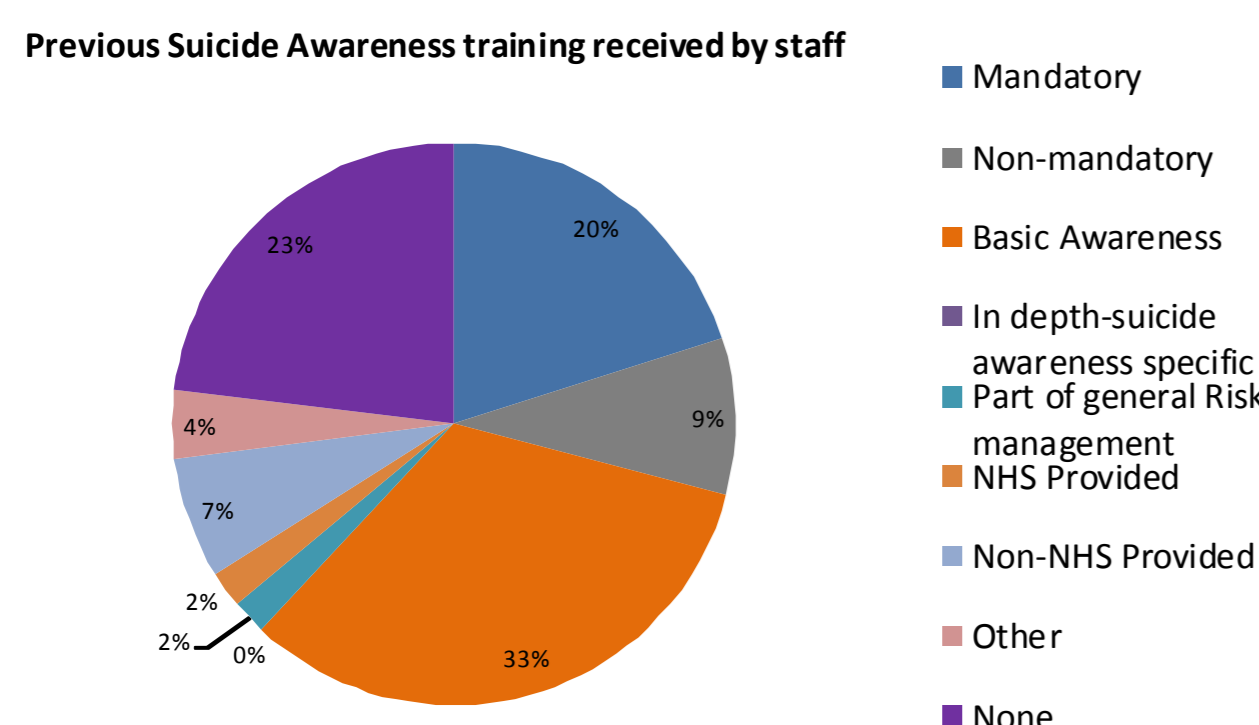
Why is it important?

- Staff often lack knowledge about suicidal behaviour and ideation, and communication between patients and staff is perceived as poor (Norheim, Grimhold & Ekeberg, 2013).
- Allows a platform for clinicians to speak openly, honestly and in confidence about their own anxieties that can often be a barrier when nursing such a complex client group.
- Addresses myths and misconceptions about patients who are suicidal; e.g talking about suicide with a person at risk may encourage the patient to take his/her life.
- Improved patient care as the clinicians feel better skilled in nursing patients with suicidal thoughts/behaviours and feel more confident in communicating with a distressed patient.
- Many healthcare professionals working in a general hospital will have had little training in this area, but are often the first point of contact for patients with suicidal thoughts/behaviour.



Prior knowledge/thoughts

Figure 1. Chart to show staff's knowledge prior to receiving training



Responses were collected from 122 attendees between June 2015— September 2016 from a variety of backgrounds including Nurses, Healthcare Assistants, Student Nurses, Occupational Therapists and Physiotherapists. Over half of respondents (56%) had received basic or no training prior to the Suicide Awareness Training delivered by the Liaison Team.

In response to the question, "What causes you the most anxiety about asking and talking about suicidal thoughts and behaviour?"

"Saying something that may cause the patient to become upset or angry" Healthcare Assistant

"How to word questions" Registered Nurse

"Confidence to solve the problem out..." Physiotherapist

The Journey

Need - An identified training need for General Hospital staff

Action - The action(s) carried out by the Liaison Team in order to meet training needs of staff.

Drop in sessions

Need: Training around suicide awareness and responses within general hospital

Action: Drop in sessions for training made available on the Medical Assessment Unit, a department that the Liaison Team work closely with.

Comprehensive training

Need: A need and desire for comprehensive training within the hospital from a variety of healthcare professionals.

Action: A bespoke and bitesized training package was created and delivered throughout the hospital for example on Medical Assessment Unit & Emergency Department.

Post incident and tailored

Need: A need was identified for prompt training and support following an incident involving a patient suicide or attempted suicide.

Action: Trainer attended the relevant department following an incident and tailored the Suicide Awareness and Responses training to the specific case. The training was therefore more meaningful to the attendees and they could apply it to their daily clinical activities.

Regular and mandatory

Need: It became clear that there was a need for more regular sessions as more staff needed to learn about the importance of suicide awareness and be confident in their interactions with patients.

Action: With the support of the acute hospital, Suicide Awareness and Responses training is now mandatory for all nurses, agency staff and those who require it.

Figure 2. South Derbyshire Liaison Team training evaluation forms

Top tips to embed training

In summary, we have learnt that there are 3 important steps to successfully embedding mental health training in a general hospital:

1. Use all natural occurring opportunities for informal training and rapport building.
2. Be ready to respond to staff and organisation's needs accordingly.
3. Be persistent!



Training Package

The training package for clinicians at the Royal Derby Hospital aims to:

- Eliminate myths around suicide and reduce fear.
- Enable staff to effectively deliver empathy, compassion and support to patients who have self-harmed or attempted suicide.
- Provide information and support on how to approach the question "are you still suicidal?".
- Empower staff to confidently manage patients presenting with suicidal thoughts/behaviours.
- Enable staff to recognise when a referral to Liaison Team is needed and how to make a safe referral.

The training utilises stories from people with lived experience of suicidal thoughts/behaviours, such as the Johnny Benjamin case; context ensures that the training is more meaningful to attendees.

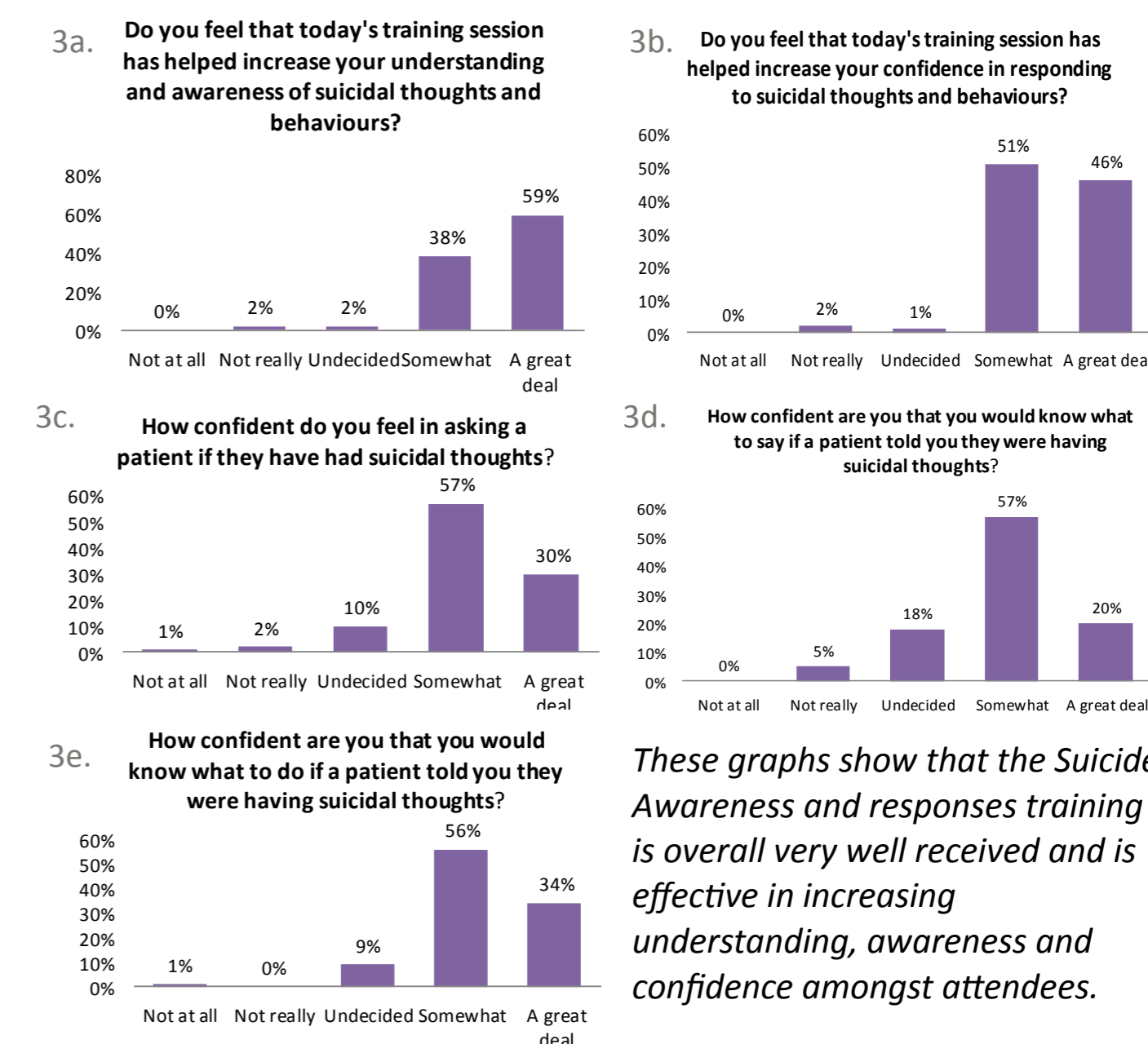
We now have a handout on how to ask questions around suicide following feedback from evaluation forms.

Outcome & Evaluation

Attendees are encouraged to complete the training evaluation form (Figure 2.) so that we can measure the effectiveness of the training and improve it based on any recommendations. Data from evaluation forms is then analysed and training evaluation reports are produced to make the collected data meaningful for trainers.

Responses were collected from June 2015—September 2016 over 14 training sessions. The majority of respondents were either Healthcare Assistants (24%) or Nurses (56%), other professions included Assistant/Occupational Therapists, Assistant/Physiotherapist, Support Workers, Student nurses, Ward sisters and Doctors.

Figures 3a-e. Graphs to show effectiveness of training



These graphs show that the Suicide Awareness and responses training is overall very well received and is effective in increasing understanding, awareness and confidence amongst attendees.

Trainer's Reflections

Along with successes of embedding the training into a general hospital, there have been some challenges. Here, the Suicide Awareness and Responses trainer reflects on some challenges.

- **Staffing;** ward not being able to release staff to attend the training
- **Time constraints;** staff have a real passion to learn more from these sessions as their experience in mental health and training has been limited. The sessions allow for an open discussion about mental health presentations and can lead on to other subjects.
- **Limited trainers;** Currently there is just one practitioner delivering these sessions. Trying to recruit other members of the Liaison Team to deliver training has been an ongoing challenge due to clinical work demands.
- **Logistics;** Training is now mandatory for agency/bank staff, they are based at a different hospital site which lengthens the time the trainer is away from clinical work due to travelling to another site.