

# Suicide and sudden death ACW training event

Issues surrounding suicide and sudden death in the workplace are complex. Organisational paralysis can emerge as people from different levels of the organisation (and externally) become involved in the aftermath.

ACW's training event on 16 June will help delegates prepare for such eventualities and examine what procedures can be put in place in advance. The event is aimed at practitioners, including those who may be called upon to provide post trauma interventions, and at organisations who remain responsible for effective incident management.

## Workshops

### Understanding and working with suicide

*Patti Wallace*

This workshop will address the following questions:

- How do people think, feel and behave when they are suicidal?
- How can we best help people who are suicidal?

The workshop leader will present an integrative approach to understanding suicide and will discuss specific interventions based on this approach.

Patti Wallace is a BACP registered counsellor and a UKCP registered integrative psychotherapist with 30 years' experience as a clinical practitioner, service manager, supervisor and trainer in the field of mental health and psychological therapies. Patti has particular expertise in working therapeutically with individuals who are suicidal or self-harming. She has worked with a number of Employee Assistance Providers (EAPs) and occupational health counselling providers to develop services and policies for working safely and effectively with this client group.

### The power of peer support: mobilising supportive resources within workplace teams

*Elspeth Schwenk*

This interactive workshop will explore the value of mobilising good peer support within workplace teams when a sudden death occurs. While professional support and therapeutic interventions have their place, colleagues are often best placed to offer informal support to one another. Taking a systemic perspective, and through an experiential case study, workshop participants will explore the pros and cons of utilising both formal and informal peer support structures, taking the role of

the workplace counsellor/supervisor and organisational culture into account.

Elspeth Schwenk is a BACP senior accredited independent counsellor and supervisor, with a particular focus in developing systemic approaches to the needs of client and company, and in delivering one-to-one and group workplace/employee assistance counselling supervision.

### Dealing with death in custody

*Charles Franks*

Compared to the general population, a disproportionate number of prisoners in the care of HM Prison Service take their own lives. What is frequently forgotten is that prison staff can be as deeply affected by these tragedies as friends and family of the deceased. This workshop will look at how those staff might be supported.

Charles Franks is head of the HM Prison Service occupational welfare service (staff care and welfare). He has 18 years' experience in the field and has trained as a counsellor and workplace mediator.

### Suicide and sudden death: whose responsibility is it?

*Annette Greenwood*

This workshop explores the psychological impact for employees and organisations when suicide or sudden death occurs in the workplace, and how at times there may be a conflict of need.

To help work through these difficult issues a psychological framework will be employed. The framework has been developed over a number of years from work within the NHS and other public sector organisations. The workshop will include real case studies and an opportunity for participants to be involved.

Annette Greenwood is head of service for one of the largest staff counselling services within the NHS. Since the beginning of the 90s Annette has set up services for staff that have been in major traumatic incidents within the NHS. She is the psychological advisor for Leicestershire for adverse events and responsible for setting up and providing psychological services after major incidents.

### Managing and assessing suicidal thoughts in clients

*Ann Heyno and Jill Collins*

This workshop aims to help counsellors:

- assess and manage suicide risk, explore how counsellors can be proactive in potential suicide situations, and ask the right questions to elicit risk factors

- examine the ethics of responsibility in cases of suicidal risk and explore whether they are constant across all cases and contexts
- consider what the expectations of disclosure are in particular contexts, eg who needs to know about suicidal risk in an organisation or outside it
- ask whether responsibilities for appropriate disclosure are the same in private practice as in organisations
- look at what support systems are available to counsellors managing high levels of suicidal risk.

Jill Collins is a staff counsellor and coordinates the staff counselling service at the University of Cambridge where she has worked for six years. Prior to that she worked with staff and students in further education, and is an experienced relationship counsellor. She is a member of the AUCC (Association for University and College Counselling) Advisory Service to Institutions, and a past chair of its staff counselling special interest group. Her background is in teaching and community education.

Ann Heyno is a student counsellor and head of the counselling and advice service at the University of Westminster. Until recently she was a tutor on the MSc in psychodynamic counselling at Birkbeck, where she taught for 19 years. For five years she was associate director of the Birkbeck group relations residential week. She is joint chair of Heads of University Counselling Services. Her background is in teaching and journalism.

### Continuity management – balancing the needs of the business and the employees

*Pam Williamson*

This workshop will enable participants to explore the dynamics of dealing with the impact of a sudden death on the organisation, colleagues and others. There will be a brief description of risk assessment and the impact of sudden death in the workplace. This will be followed by undertaking a risk assessment of a sudden death. The last part of the workshop will look at the practical needs of the bereaved family.

This workshop would be of value to HR practitioners and counsellors interested in understanding how organisations approach the management of sudden death at work.

Pam is a BACP accredited counsellor and director of pamwilliamson consultancy, providing coaching, trauma support, counselling and supervision. Pam is also a consultant for Noreen Tehrani at ARC providing psychological assessments for rehabilitation. While working for the Prison Service, Pam contributed to the policies, training and support of prisoners and staff following incidents of sudden death. When developing her interest in suicide and loss, including the 'loss of self' after trauma, she noticed how culture (of individuals and the organisation) affected coping and drove the policies. Her work is published in *Working inter-culturally in counselling settings* (Brunner-Routledge).

### Employees who commit suicide: the ultimate failure? *Colin Grange*

This workshop will explore how employee assistance services work to prevent suicide among employees of client organisations. The workshop will also consider how employee assistance professionals can support staff in the aftermath of the suicide of a work colleague. The impact of a client committing suicide on a workplace counsellor will be explored.

Colin Grange is chair of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association UK and clinical director of the Ceridian LifeWorks EAP service. He has worked in EAPs for more than 12 years and before this was senior lecturer in counselling psychology at Wolverhampton University, running a Master's degree in psychological counselling. Colin has practised as a counselling psychologist in business, clinical, educational, and private practice settings.

### Case study scenarios

The training event will also include group workshops that will reflect on several case study scenarios, giving delegates a chance to explore the issues involved and options available. The plenary session will allow for feedback from this session while a more detailed summary will be published in a future issue of *Counselling at Work* (as confidentiality allows).

#### Case study 1

Angela was an employee of a high street store. One Thursday afternoon, a customer snatched a handbag from another customer and ran out of the store. As she exited, the thief banged into Angela and knocked her into a shelving unit. Angela's head caught the corner of the unit and she suffered fatal injuries, dying before she reached hospital. Within half an hour of the incident, the HR director of the company telephoned the EAP and asked for counselling for all the staff and customers who were in the store at the time.

*How might the HR director be advised at this point?*

The EAP clinical manager rings the HR director later that evening to ask how things have progressed. The HR director is very tearful and says this is the first fatality she has had to deal with and she is finding it difficult to cope. The next morning she has to talk to staff who were off duty when the incident happened. At the weekend, she will need to talk to the eight part-timers, many of whom are schoolgirls. The police have closed the store as a crime scene and it will not open for at least another week. Her fellow directors are keen to resume trading as soon as possible, but in the meantime she doesn't know what to do with the staff. She also has to visit her mother every day in a care home,

and doesn't know how to fit everything in.  
*How might this HR director be supported?*  
*What can the employer do in terms of staff returning to work on Friday, and the part-time weekend staff?*

On Saturday morning, the regional manager rings the EAP and says that the situation is escalating, that no one can cope and that he wants a guarantee that there will be a counsellor on site on Monday.  
*How might this organisation and the EAP deal with the problems this incident has created?*

### Case study 2

Andrew was an employee of a large service industry organisation that operates during normal office hours, Monday to Friday. At 6pm on Friday evening, Andrew sends an email to about 5,000 staff reading:

'Dear colleagues,

By the time you read this I will be gone. Since my wife left me life has been unbearable and now I have been refused relocation by our employer to allow me to start afresh. I don't have any option left but to end it all. I didn't want people spreading rumours about me or about why I had done it, so I am writing to you all to set the record straight. If I had been allowed to move to the North of England it would have been all

right, but our employer says that isn't possible.  
It has been a privilege to work with you but now I have to go.  
Andrew'

The HR manager is working late and reads this at 6.30pm.  
*What could the HR manager do?*

On Sunday night, Andrew is found dead in his car.  
*What can the employer do in terms of staff returning to work on Monday morning?*

On Monday afternoon, a team leader phones the EAP and asks for post-trauma support for his team of eight staff who all read the email and, although they didn't know Andrew, are traumatised by the email. Another team leader rings and asks for support because his staff are very distressed – they worked alongside Andrew.  
*How might this organisation deal with the problems this incident has created?*

For further information on the event, please email [events@bacp.co.uk](mailto:events@bacp.co.uk) or telephone 0870 443 5229. Please note that places are limited.

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