

SUICIDE RISK ASSESSMENT: IMPROVING ASSESSMENT AND DECREASING RISK

A completed suicide is one of the most dreaded outcomes of mental illness and has become an ever-increasing focus in the military population. Humana Military and ValueOptions recognize that the primary care office is the front line for prevention of suicides and that suicide risk screening is an important component in preventative medicine.

Research on this topic provides us with a number of both predictive and associated factors that are commonly present in cases where there is a completed suicide. **There is no algorithm or scoring tool which in and of itself can identify level of suicide risk in any consistent manner.**

Determination of suicide risk is directly dependent on the clinical judgment of the physician assessing the factors in the context of the person's current biopsychosocial climate and thoughtfully formulating a summary that identifies the potential risk of suicide in the near future.

In today's environment, with time pressures, it may be a challenge to elicit suicidality, evaluate all of the predictive and associated risk factors for suicide in the course of completing an assessment. It is useful to identify what interventions may modify risk of a completed suicide. Many risk factors are not modifiable, such as age, but many others may potentially be modified.

Your formulation will be key to document your clinical thinking and to guide your treatment and disposition decisions. Your formulation should document the risk factors and risk reduction factors identified, describe your estimation of the patient's risk for suicide in the near future (e.g., low, moderate or high), as well as necessary interventions to assure patient safety and facilitate stabilization.

It is essential to quality clinical practice to ensure that modifiable risk factors are identified, formulation is documented and the actions are put in place in the treatment planning and disposition process to attempt to decrease the risk of a completed suicide.

Humana Military, in coordination with ValueOptions, is making available to primary care providers a brief suicide risk assessment (attached) tailored to the primary care practice setting. This form includes predictive risk factors for completed suicide in one easy to use assessment tool with space for the clinical documentation of both level of risk and recommended interventions for modifiable risk factors.

Humana Military encourages your office to utilize this tool as a component of your primary prevention and initial screening practices to support your quality suicide risk assessment and risk reduction.