

WATERLOO REGION SUICIDE PREVENTION COUNCIL

Suicide Information and Awareness is Important – You're not Alone

ISSUE NUMBER 13 APRIL 2007



Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council

Problem Gambling and Suicide

Mary Denomme

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health defines gambling as risking money or something of value on events that have an element of chance. They go on to describe problem gambling as a pattern of events that causes harm to an individual's personal or family life, work, finances or health.

Gambling, as a popular social activity, has become widespread throughout Canada and the United States. Opportunities for gambling have increased. Gambling activities include:

- casinos
- racetracks
- slots
- lotteries
- scratch tickets
- card games such as poker and black jack
- sports betting
- bingo

- office pools
- online or internet gambling

In Canada, the federal net revenues for gambling increased from \$1.7 billion in 1992 to \$6 billion in 2003. In that time, gambling losses across Canada were \$10.2 billion. In 2004-2005, Ontario generated \$4.7 billion in revenue from gambling in the province.

As gambling and the number of problem gamblers have increased, so has the rate of gambling related suicide. More attention needs to be paid to the serious consequences of problem gambling. Problem gambling has been identified as a risk factor leading to suicide. Problem gamblers have high rates of both suicide ideation (thinking about suicide) and suicide attempts (an action where there is a clear intent to die). A 1985 community sampling from Edmonton, Alberta revealed that 13.3% of pathological gamblers had made suicide attempts. In a 1994 Quebec study of college students, 26.8% of pathological gamblers had attempted suicide compared to 7.2% of college students who had no gambling problem. A 1991 survey of Gamblers Anonymous members in the United States found that 48% had considered suicide and 13% had attempted suicide. The Canada Safety Council estimates that approximately 200 problem gamblers die by suicide each year in Canada.

A 2004 study conducted in Nova Scotia names problem gambling as a factor in over 6% of suicides in that province. Nova Scotia is the only province that specifically asks about gambling when investigating deaths by suicide. In other provinces, if no one mentions problem gambling, investigators do not ask.

Statistics on suicides and attempted suicides related to gambling are very hard to collect. One reason is that investigators may not always pursue gambling as a factor. Even if they did ask, problem gamblers and those close to them may harbour feelings of shame and guilt and try to hide the problem.

In a 1996 report by the National Council of Welfare, it was pointed out that suicide attempts among pathological gamblers are much more frequent than among the general population. Compared to other addictions, suicide attempts are more
(Continued on page 2)

CONTENTS

Problem Gambling and Suicide..	1
How You Can Help Someone with a Gambling Problem.....	3
Lowering Your Risk of Developing a Gambling Problem.....	3
Healthy Alternatives to Gambling.....	3
Youth Talk Makes a Difference..	3
We Are Growing Up.....	3
Stick With It.....	4
Upcoming Events.....	5

common among pathological gamblers. As well, problem gamblers often have other dependencies such as alcohol or drug abuse.

In a 2001 Ontario study, 7% of young adults (18 to 24 years of age) reported gambling problems. This is almost twice the rate found in the general population. In the same study, 6.1% of severe problem gamblers had considered suicide.

Clinicians need to ask about suicide when they screen and assess people with gambling problems. Persons with moderate to severe gambling problems are less likely to report suicidal feelings or plans. They usually experience extreme feelings of hopelessness, guilt, self-hatred and low self-esteem. These feelings in turn raise their levels of anxiety and despair.

Problem gambling is also linked to a wide range of other serious personal and social harms such as:

- bankruptcy
- family breakup
- domestic abuse
- assault
- fraud
- theft
- homelessness

Higher rates of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, alcohol and drug related problems are associated with problem gambling. Children of problem gamblers are affected and are two times more likely to attempt suicide. Spouses are three times more likely to attempt suicide. The financial costs of problem gambling are difficult to estimate and include medical care, policing, courts, prison, social assistance and business loss. Yearly costs associated with

a problem gambler vary from \$560.00 to \$56,000.00 in Canada. As well, it has been estimated that each problem gambler affects at least 3 other people.

Some of the signs of a gambling problem include:

Money Problems:

- less money appears to be available
- debts are building up
- money goes missing from a wallet, bank account or investments/RRSPs

Behaviour Changes:

- neglects responsibilities or makes excuses
- late for work
- disappears for long periods of time
- avoids family get-togethers or social functions
- appears preoccupied
- appears deceptive or secretive about their behaviour, particularly around money
- changes in their sleep, eating or sexual relationship patterns

Relationship Problems:

- withdraws from family and friends
- appears to be edgy, reactive or defensive

Warning signs that an adolescent may have a gambling problem include:

- missing school
- borrows or steals money from family and friends
- appears preoccupied with video arcades or internet gambling sites
- sometimes has large amounts of unexplained cash

For more information on problem gambling, call the Problem Gambling Hotline at 1-888-2303505 or St. Mary's

Counselling Service at 519-745-2585.

Sources:

Zangeneh, M. 2005. Suicide and gambling. Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health 4(1). Available at www.auseinet.com/journalvol4iss1/zangeneheditorial.pdf

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Carlson, B. 2004. Suicide and problem gambling. Psychologica Vol. 24 No. 3

Waterloo Region Action Group on Gambling Issues. 2005. Key messages.

How You Can Help Someone with a Gambling Problem

- tell the person that you are concerned about his/her gambling
- give the person information regarding getting professional help for the problem
- offer to attend a Gamblers' Anonymous meeting with the person
- be a support to the person, but know that you cannot change someone else

Lowering Your Risk of Developing a Gambling Problem

There is always risk when you choose to gamble, but here are some ways of lowering your risk of developing a gambling problem (Continued on page 3)

problem:

- set money and time limits and stick to them
- balance gambling with other activities
- know that gambling is not a way to make money and that over time will lose more money than you win – gambling is designed so that players will lose money
- never borrow money or use credit to gamble – leave debit and credit cards at home
- only spend what you would spend on other recreational activities
- never use gambling as a way to escape negative feelings such as anger, depression, loneliness or boredom
- do not gamble alone
- take breaks while gambling
- hope to win but expect to lose
- choose to stop gambling if you think that you have or are developing a gambling problem

Healthy Alternatives to Gambling

Gambling is an activity like no other. It is the only recreational activity that does not cost a certain price for a certain length of time. Almost any other activity costs less than gambling.

Alternative activities include:

- joining a gym
- taking a yoga class
- going to or renting a movie
- playing cards without betting money
- doing crafts
- doing sports
- gardening
- taking care of a pet
- going to the library
- going to live theatre

- learning to play a musical instrument
- taking an interest course
- anything that does not involve betting money



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BOTH INDIVIDUAL AND
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DONATIONS ARE
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PLEASE FORWARD YOUR
DONATION TO:**

**Waterloo Region Suicide
Prevention Council
c/o 171 King St. S.
Waterloo ON N2J 1P7**



Youth Talk Makes a Difference

The Suicide Resource Group, the Upper Grand District School Board and the Canadian Mental Health Association – Grand River Branch have been working together on a three year collaborative effort to create youth-led projects. Phase One, supported by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, provided education and support to the highly successful theatrical play “A Permanent Solution...” which toured throughout Wellington and Dufferin County high schools. The second part of the “Youth Talk” educational initiative is also possible thanks to a grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. In Phase Two, peer activities will assist students to talk more openly about the risks of suicide, develop an understanding of the

signs of distress in their peers, build coping skills to face their struggles, and learn about where to go for help.

Our community has taken up the challenge of facing the myths and realities of suicide in a proactive and life-affirming way. We believe it is important to acknowledge the achievements already made and the spirit of hope that our most recent suicide prevention initiative brings.

We Are Growing Up....

Dena Moitosa

From a town meeting, to a community council, to a working council and now to incorporation and charitable designation – wow, we have really grown up!

The Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council is pleased to announce that we have received official incorporation status from the Revenue Canada Agency. In order to achieve this designation we have had to prove not only our commitment and dedication to our mission, but also that we are accountable and have a track record of responsibility to our community. It is fitting that we were able to attain this designation in the 10th year since our council was formed. What a lovely reward for the hard work of all the past and present council members who have contributed to this point in our history. The other reward we get from our incorporation is the charitable status. This means that all donations will now be granted a charitable tax deductible receipt. Our charitable designation also affords us opportunities to apply for funding from local foundations and the United Way. Although we have been

(Continued on page 4)

discussing the opportunity to apply to Revenue Canada for this title, it has been our lack of resources that has kept us from moving forward with this – until one of our local families decided to take this matter under their wing and help to realize this goal. The Tudisco family from Cambridge made it their mission to see us “grow up”. With the help and generosity of lawyer Doug Grandy and the encouragement of Louise Tudisco, we did it!

Since then we have updated our by-law, developed a stamp with the magic taxable number and we have changed our mailing address to correspond with a location that is accessible and can house all of our materials. The Kuntz House of the Erb & Good Family Funeral Home at 171 King St. S. in Waterloo will now be our official home. As we continue to “mature” we will strive to bring further development to all of our efforts that promote education and awareness of mental health issues. Together we will be able to reduce the incidence of suicide and encourage a healthy and caring community.

Stick With It...A Huge Success!

Cathy McDonald-Reis

Similar to a hockey game, or any other large project, the prevention of addictions and suicide in a community requires a team. The Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council teamed up with Ray of Hope and the Royal Bank to bring our community together in order to raise awareness about suicide and addictions in Waterloo Region. This was achieved through a competitive game of hockey.

The Stick With It event was held on Saturday March 3, 2007 and was a great success. In addition to a great game of hockey, numerous community agencies involved in suicide and addiction prevention/treatment took part with displays in the lobby of the Kitchener Memorial Auditorium (The Aud).

The Kitchener Rangers Alumni and the National Hockey League (NHL) Alumni played a real game of hockey. Some of hockey’s greatest came out to support our cause. Kitchener Ranger legends such as Paul Coffey, Mike Torchia, and Jeff Noble, along with the NHL’s Gary Leeman, Peter Zedel and Bob Probert drew more than 2,500 enthusiastic fans to the The AUD to watch. The Kitchener Rangers won the game, thereby allowing the Ron Ellis Trophy to remain in Kitchener where it hails from.

A banquet followed the game. Keynote speakers were Ron Ellis and Susan Hess.

Ron Ellis is a former Toronto Maple Leaf, 1972 Team Canada Summit Series player, current employee with the NHL Hockey Hall of Fame, and author. In his autobiography “Over the Boards”, Ron speaks publicly about his own battle with depression throughout his hockey career and during his retirement. His talk ranged from memories of sharing the locker room with hockey legends Tim Horton and Johnny Bower in the 60’s and 70’s, to offering advice on putting your pride aside to face depression. He spoke eloquently and passionately to a full house about the role of families, physicians, and employers in dealing with depression and how that support is critical to long-term

management. He ended by giving us hope that a person with depression can lead a normal life.

Susan Hess is President of Parents for Children’s Mental Health and the parent of a child with mental illness. Susan is the creator of the “Quilt of Honour” which recognizes children who struggle with mental illness, and many who have died by suicide. Her message of encouragement, dedication and commitment inspired the crowd.

Part of the Stick With It campaign was to recognize people in our community who have contributed to the advancement of mental health prevention and treatment in our community. Several wonderful agencies and individuals received a “Ron Ellis Award” for their contributions in our Region. Congratulations go to:

- Bernard Porlier – (Retired) Executive Director, K-W Counselling
- Canadian Mental Health Association – Grand River Branch, Community Development and Education Services
- Pauline Potzold R.N., Community Liaison and Education Facilitator – Grand River Hospital, Psychiatric and Mental Health Program
- Quarry Integrated Corporation
- Ron Ellis – Athlete, Public Speaker
- Tom Cassidy, Teacher, Mentor – Waterloo Region District School Board
- University of Waterloo MATES (Mood Assistance Through Educational Support) Program
- Wendy Schuster, Child and
(Continued on page 5)

Youth Care Worker –
Waterloo Catholic District
School Board

Part of this event included a contest for students from the high schools in Waterloo Region. Literature and artwork was submitted by students. The winners were:

- Claire O'Brien – Cameron Heights Collegiate Institute for the short essay contest
- Casey Potter – Grand River Collegiate Institute for poetry
- Deidre Jones – Grand River Collegiate Institute for artwork

To learn more about our wonderful speakers and advocates for mental health go to: www.parentsforchildrensmentalhealth.org and www.moodsmag.com/your_stories_2.htm.

Special thanks to Region of Waterloo Public Health for their support in the printing and distribution of this newsletter.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Mental Health Week

The theme for Mental Health Week 2007 is Work/Life Balance. This is a topic that everyone can benefit from. The Canadian Mental Health Association will be distributing information about this important topic to selected workplaces in order to support organizations in their recognition of Mental Health Week and their efforts at promoting healthy integration of work and personal demands. For more information, contact the Canadian Mental Health Association at 519-745-7609.

FREE COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

Thursday May 10, 2007
4:00 P.M. – 6:00 P.M.

at Bingeman Park

Featuring:

DR. DAVID POSEN

Dr. Posen is medical doctor, published author, leading speaker and trainer on stress mastery, change management and work-life balance.

For more information, contact Canadian Mental Health Association at 519-744-7645.

World Suicide Prevention Day September 10, 2007

Planning is currently underway for events that support World Suicide Awareness Week. September 10th was been designated by the World Health Organization to be World Suicide Prevention Day. In the past four years, there has been a global effort to ensure that the word gets out. Here in Waterloo Region we remain committed to this effort.

A charity golf tournament, a community forum, a remembrance celebration and various publications will all be a part of the effort to honour and recognize those affected by suicide.

If you are interested in helping or participating in any of these events, please contact Dena Moitoso at denamoitoso@erbgood.com.

Working Together

Working Together is an experiential workshop designed by LivingWorks to support a community's ongoing efforts at helping individuals who are at risk of suicide. This one day workshop offers the opportunity to explore the challenges presented to and the competencies required of the helpers who need to work cooperatively with others in order to help persons at risk of suicide on a long term basis. Working Together can help people and systems identify death-linking helping behaviours and life-linking behaviours.

Some of the topics that will be explored include:

- Recognizing and addressing obstacles in building connections
- Reactions to individuals who have thoughts of suicide or suicidal behaviours
- Impact of helper's experiences on their responses and interactions
- Use of natural supports
- Building connections for people at risk
- Referring to most the appropriate services
- Discovering and developing life-linking ways for helpers and communities to make, monitor, and maintain connections that reduce the risk of suicidal behaviour

This workshop is sponsored by the Waterloo Regional Suicide Prevention Council, the Wellington-Dufferin Suicide Resource Group, and the Canadian Mental Health Association-Grand River Branch. It will be held on November 7, 2007. Space is limited, so *(Continued on page 6)*

availability will be by invitation only.

For more information contact Linda Bender at 1-866-448-1603 Ext. 240.

**CANADIAN ASSOCIATION
FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION
(CASP) Conference 2007**

Embracing Life
Choosing Your Future
October 5 – 8, 2007
Yellowknife NWT

For more information, go to www.suicideprevention.ca.



CANDLES

Please help support the Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council by purchasing beautiful candles for your enjoyment. A set of 3-6" pillars on a glass plate in four different scents for only \$15.00. To order, call 519-744-7645 Ext. 310 and leave a message.

safeTALK Workshop

safeTALK is half-day workshop designed for anyone who connects with people in a school, recreational, security, community service, faith community, health, neighbourhood or other community setting, and who have little or no training in suicide intervention. safeTALK trains people to recognize suicidal thoughts, talk directly about suicide, and connect people at risk with suicide prevention resources.

An additional safeTALK workshop has been scheduled for:

Wednesday June 6, 2007
1:00 P.M. – 5:00 P.M.
Canadian Mental Health
Association Boardroom
5420 Hwy. 6 North
Guelph ON

For more information, or to register, please call 1-866-448-1603 Ext. 323, or e-mail workshops@cmhagrb.on.ca.

Remember...there is no single solution in suicide prevention and there is a role that everyone in society can play.

Dimensions of Suicide Fourth Annual Conference

Beyond Linear Causes

Thursday November 8 2007
8:15 A.M. – 4:00 P.M.
The Sunshine Centre Luther
Village on the Park
141 Father David Bauer Dr.
Waterloo ON

Presenter:

Richard Ramsay, Professor
Emeritus School of Social
Work, University of
Calgary; President – Living
Works

For more information
contact:

Pauline Potzold at
519-749-4300 Ext. 2333 or
pauline.potzold@grhosp.on.ca

RESOURCES AVAILABLE THROUGH WRSPC

**Waterloo Region Suicide
Prevention Council Brochure**

WHY?? Suicide Brochure

**WHY?? Suicide and Youth
Brochure**

**WHY?? Suicide and the
Older Adult Brochure**

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**Coming Soon!!! Watch for
our new Caregiver Guide.**



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