



16 New Antrim St.,
Castlebar, Co. Mayo

Phone: + 353 94 92 50858
Fax: + 353 94 92 50859
Email: info@ias.ie
Web: www.ias.ie

Irish Association of Suicidology

An Introduction



Aims and Objectives

The Association was founded in 1996 and among its aims and objectives are the following:

- To facilitate communications between clinicians, volunteers, survivors and researchers in all matters relating to suicide and suicidal behaviour
- To promote awareness of the problem of suicide and suicidal behaviour in the general public by holding conferences and workshops and by communication of relevant material through the media
- To ensure that the public is better informed about suicide prevention
- To support and encourage relevant research
- To encourage and support the formation of groups to help those bereaved by suicide

Irish Association of Suicidology

Introduction

The Association, established in 1996, is registered as a charity in both jurisdictions on this island. It is affiliated to the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP). The Association has played an important part in ensuring that the problem of suicide has remained in the public arena. Through its conferences, newsletter, website, public lectures and talks by members of the board it has reached out to a large cross section of people thirsting for information about suicide and suicide prevention.

For centuries suicide was a taboo subject and both the suicidal person and their families were stigmatised. It is good to see that in this respect there has been a great deal of improvement in the past decade much of it due to the educational efforts of the IAS. There is however still a long way to go to abolish the stigma related to suicide and deliberate self harm (DSH).

Portrayal of Suicide in the Media

In partnership with Samaritans the IAS produced 'Guidelines for the Portrayal of Suicide in the Media' launched by our Patron Mary McAleese, President of Ireland in 2002. The guidelines were produced on foot of very many requests from journalists and others working in the media for advice on the portrayal and reporting of suicide, cognisant of the fact that certain types of reporting of suicide can lead to copycat suicide. Copycat suicide accounts for between 6% and 13% of all suicides most commonly in adolescents and the elderly. Judging from feed back from the media the guidelines quickly became a valuable much used resource. In consultation with the media the guidelines were revised and re-distributed in 2006.

A PDF version of the guidelines can be accessed on the IAS website www.ias.ie

Suicide Prevention in Schools

The rates of suicides among young people continues to be a matter of grave concern. Over the years the IAS has had numerous calls from teachers and school guidance counsellors seeking advice on how to manage a suicidal crisis in the school and how to cope with the aftermath of a completed suicide. Schools have a very important, if limited, role to play in suicide prevention. First in identifying students at risk and second in ensuring that they leave school with the necessary skill to cope with the problems that will inevitably arise in the course of their lives. As a response to these requests 'Suicide Prevention in Schools Best Practice Guidelines' was published in 2000, following consultation with teachers, educational psychologists, schools guidance counsellors, the department of education and science, parents organisations and youth groups. The guidelines were launched by our Patron Mary McAleese, President of Ireland in 2000. The guidelines were circulated to all second level schools and have proved to be a very useful resource for teachers judging by the positive feed back received.

A series of workshops for teachers and school guidance counsellors on the use of the

guidelines and how to develop a suicide prevention policy for schools was initiated in 2000 and will be a continuing feature of IAS activities

In addition the IAS has hosted six national conferences on issues involved in suicide prevention in schools such as Suicide Prevention Programmes, Bullying, Alcohol and Drugs Misuse, Crisis Management and Partnerships to Prevent Youth Suicide.

The school guidelines are due to be revised and updated in consultation with all the stake holders in the field.

Supporting the Bereaved

The IAS has been active in supporting those bereaved by suicide. Part of our annual conference is devoted to the bereaved. In 2004 the IAS published a leaflet on coping with bereavement through suicide which was distributed to all bereavement support groups and other voluntary groups.

Website

Website was launched in 2000 and contains up to date statistics on suicide in Ireland north and south as well as information on suicide and suicidal behaviour as for instance, the myths about suicide, the risk factors and warning signs of impending suicide.

The site also contains the addresses of, and links to other educational sites dealing with suicide, depression and details of support organisations both statutory and voluntary.

Donations On Line

A facility is now in place on our website where we can accept on line donations.

Newsletter

The IAS quarterly newsletter was launched in 2004 and continues to be used as an information resource in schools and for the media. The leaflet has attracted submissions for publication from a wide range of people in the general public as well as members of the helping professions.

Information Leaflets

Dissemination of information on all aspects of suicide, suicide prevention and related matters has always been a core activity of the IAS. Responding to multiple requests for help, advice and information the association developed and published the following information leaflets:

- Living with a Suicidal Person: what families can do.
- Teen depression.
- Helping/supporting someone who is grieving.
- Depression self-help – living with depression in yourself.
- Living with a depressed person.
- If you are feeling suicidal...

- Depression: signs, symptoms and risk factors.
- Managing grief and loss after suicide.
- Directory of services.

These leaflets are available on request from the IAS office and can be purchased in bulk by interested organisations and voluntary groups

Conferencing

In the 10 years of its existence the association has held 16 major conferences covering all aspects of suicide and suicide prevention. The conferences have been of a consistently high standard and have afforded delegates an opportunity to meet and hear leading world experts from home and abroad on all the issues covered. The conferences have attracted a great deal of media attention. The publications of the proceedings of the conferences are available and are widely consulted as an educational asset and as a source of information by students and others undertaking research.

Representation on Boards

The IAS was represented on the National Suicide Review Group and took an active part in drawing up 'Reach Out' the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. The association is represented on the Advisory Group to the National Office for Suicide Prevention.

Support and advice for other organisations include:

- Console – Bereavement Support counselling service
- Smashing Times Theatre Company which has developed a series of plays aimed at raising awareness of suicide in schools and in the general population
- TEAM Educational Theatre Company developing programmes for primary and post-primary schools
- Pieta House - Centre for the Prevention of Self-Harm or Suicide

Servicing the Needs of the Public

The IAS office receives and deals with numerous calls from people looking for help and information about all matters relating to suicide. Many calls are from people in distress who find difficulty in accessing help and services in their locality. These are put in contact with the appropriate statutory and voluntary services nearest to them. The office continues to receive numerous calls from the media, teachers, and various other groups for information and advice. Request for courses on suicide prevention and the management of the suicidal crisis are received from groups such as the gardai, prison officers, psychologists and interested voluntary groups. These requests are dealt with as far as financial resources allow.

Survey: Attitudes to Suicide North and South

In 2006 the IAS commissioned Millward Brown IMS to carry out a survey on Attitudes to Suicide in Ireland North and South. The survey was launched by Mr Tim O'Malley

Minister for Disability and Mental Health at the Department of Health in 2006.

The very interesting results of the survey show that in general Irish people are knowledgeable about suicide and have a very caring attitude to those who are suicidal. 70% of people in Ireland know someone who has ended their life by suicide. Worryingly 38% of young men aged 15 – 24 had no knowledge of where and how to access help if they were feeling suicidal.

A PDF version of the results of the survey is available on the IAS website www.ias.ie

Fundraising

The IAS is a non profit organisation and need money to develop and continue its work. Core funding that just about covers the day to day administrative costs of the organisation has been provided by the Department of Health through the HSE. Additional money needs to be raised to continue the IAS training programmes publications and educational programmes and achieve all of the aims and objectives of the association.

Hosted the IASP Congress 2007

The IAS had the honour of hosting the XXIV biennial congress of IASP (International Association for Suicide Prevention) in the Irish National Events Centre (INEC) in 2007, under the patronage of Mary McAleese, President of Ireland. The title of the congress was 'Preventing Suicide Across the Lifespan: Dreams and Realities'. The congress attracted delegates from 43 countries and over 500 presentations. The book of abstracts is available on the IAS website www.ias.ie

Officers and Members of the Board of Directors of the IAS

President - Dan Neville TD

Chairman - Professor Michael Fitzgerald, Henry Marsh Professor of child and adolescent psychiatry

Secretary - Dr. John F. Connolly, Consultant Psychiatrist

Dr. Justin Brophy, Consultant Psychiatrist

Dr. Anne Cleary, Lecturer in Sociology, UCD

Mr Michael Fahy, Psychiatric Nurse, Solace Bereavement Support Group

Mr. Andrew Garvey, Chairman, Console

Dr Mary Hutchinson, Department of Sociology, University of Coleraine

Dr. Margaret Kelleher, Director, National Suicide Research Foundation

Mr. Paul Kelly, Executive Director, Console

Mr. Owen Kirk, Developer, Rossmere Developments Ltd

Mr. Gareth O'Callaghan, Broadcaster

Mr. Tony O'Connor, Bank Manager, Galway

Mr Barry McGale, Suicide Awareness Co-ordinator, Western Health and Social Services Board, NI

Ms Eileen Williamson, Programme Manager, National Suicide Research Foundation

Ms. Josephine Scott, Executive Officer

Ms. Angela Coleman, Clerical Assistant

The board consists of representatives of various voluntary organisations, clinicians, researchers and persons who have been bereaved through suicide. The directors have a wide experience of all aspects of suicide and suicidal behaviour with a great deal of experience of relevant research both national and international. Between them they have published numerous learned papers and books. For this reason the IAS is a group well fitted to support and advise other voluntary organisations, individuals and professional groups.