CNP TESTIFIES BEFORE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE ON NAVY SUICIDE PREVENTION

“Only when we work together will we be able to make a difference.”–Vice Admiral Scott Van Buskirk, Chief of Naval Personnel

On March 21, Vice Adm. Van Buskirk updated the House Armed Services Committee on recent Navy suicides and prevention efforts, as a part of an annual hearing with leaders from each of the armed forces, the Defense Suicide Prevention Office, and the Suicide Prevention Resource Center. His remarks included both analysis of the past year’s suicide data from the force, as well as Navy’s comprehensive approach to address stress mitigation and suicide.

Regarding trends and analyses, Van Buskirk cited relationship stress, work-related stress, legal problems and financial woes as prevailing factors in Navy suicide-related behaviors and deaths. He noted that there isn’t a clear relationship between deployment and suicide deaths for Navy, and that risk factors closely mirror those of the civilian population. "While stressors may contribute to suicide risk," he acknowledged, "resiliency is strengthened through leadership and peer support, strong family bonds, support services and a sense of purpose."

In reviewing Navy’s resilience-building and suicide prevention initiatives, Suicide Prevention Coordinators were lauded as a solid foundation of Navy’s unit-level efforts. While suicide prevention in the Navy and across the DOD remains a leadership-driven effort, Navy’s approach is particularly focused on the deck plate. SPCs play a crucial role in enhancing leaders’ abilities to know their people and break down barriers that discourage access to resources, or dissuade those in need from seeking help. Recognizing when a shipmate is in trouble, and being able to "break the code of silence" and intervene, promotes resilience and reinforces a sense of community.

"In 2012, over 1,900 Sailors requested and received command assistance" for suicide related behaviors. Others have sought help from chaplains, family services or medical professionals," Van Buskirk stated. This number indicates an increase in Sailors coming forward on their own or due to the encouragement of a leader, peer or support network, showing immeasurable signs of strength and resilience. "Only when we work together will we be able to make a difference," he stated. For more on this year’s hearings, click here.
LIFELINK SPOTLIGHT

Lt. Jared Smith
Command Chaplain, NAF El Centro

We don’t always get to hear all of the wonderful things commands are doing to promote suicide prevention awareness, but Lt. Jared Smith has been keeping us in the know when it comes to Naval Air Facility El Centro. With his help, NAF El Centro was able to schedule Nick Vujicic to speak to the command at their last suicide prevention event. Mr. Vujicic was born without arms or legs and almost completed a suicide attempt as a child, but made the choice to keep living. His story of inspiration and extraordinary determination motivated audience members, and touched those who had overcome feelings of purposelessness and despair. The event was filled to capacity, and garnered much positive feedback from Sailors in attendance. Recognizing that the Navy emphasizes stress control and resilience when it comes to suicide prevention, Lt. Smith told local media that having Mr. Vujicic share his story is a way to promote a message of resilience within the command. One Senior Chief Petty Officer left the event with the reinforcement that “you never quit, you need to face your fears and it takes courage to move forward.” Thanks for sharing your event with us, shipmate!

Read more about the event or watch a video clip here.

Who will be next in the spotlight?
Nominate your proactive SPC, caring shipmate or leader, or your entire command for their efforts to build a sense of community and prevent suicide. Email your nomination to caroline.miles.ctr@navy.mil

RESILIENCE CORNER

Navy Chaplains: A Community Dedicated to Building a Sense of Belonging and Fellowship

Excerpt from NavyNavStress, by Chaplain William E. Middleton, CREDO Director, Naval District Washington

Military kids serve alongside their uniformed parents and our role as chaplains includes addressing their needs as well. Our shore based chapels often function as a community center where child focused activities include religious education, rites of baptism and communion, and sacraments from various religious traditions. Chaplains also offer chapel space for Scouting programs, home school groups, Vacation Bible School programs and other community organizations in installations around the world. For newly transferred families, a military chapel can be a place to start building that important sense of belonging, of community and fellowship.

While our religious services and programs are very important to our service members and their families, the chapel provides a familiar and safe place for kids to connect with other military kids. As chaplains we know how important maintaining contact can be and we help families keep in touch through the United Through Reading. The program invites all deploying service members to record themselves reading stories to their children and then a DVD is mailed home to the family. Chaplains facilitate this program on ships at sea and coordinate with USO’s around the world, even down range, to maintain this important connection between parent and child.

As chaplains we don’t work alone. If a battalion chaplain is deployed, he or she can reach back to our regimental chaplain for assistance to help a family or child in crisis or a ship’s squadron chaplain can reach back to the shore-based ministry center for help. By connecting families with local resources like the Navy Ombudsmen or Marine Corps Family Readiness Officers, our chaplains serve service members by helping families at home navigate the daily demands of military family life. Knowing their families are cared for, our deployed Sailors and Marines can focus on the job at hand. To read the post in its entirety, click here.
This month marks the start of Navy's Keep What You've Earned campaign, emphasizing responsible drinking to avoid jeopardizing your Navy career. Keeping what you've earned extends beyond the achievements distinguished by collar devices or khakis. It extends beyond the pride of knowing that you are a part of a small and elite group of Americans even eligible for Naval service. Keeping what you've earned applies to the friendships you've cultivated over the years, the family you've built and nurtured, and life as you know it.

Success rarely comes without struggle—or stress. A drink after a long day's work may seem to ease your mind, but if excessive drinking is used as a response to operational stress, disrupted sleep or the pressures of family life, the things that seem like small problems may intensify. This is particularly true for those who are working through depression or psychological issues. Using alcohol to ease stress will inevitably add to it. For many, endangering your health and endangering your Navy career can also mean placing a strain on the relationships with your loved ones, and a declining focus on your responsibilities. Put those ingredients in a martini shaker, and you'll end up with a cocktail of suicide risk factors.

According to research by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, substance abuse is one of the biggest risk factors for suicide-related behaviors. On average, about 33% of Navy suicides involve alcohol. It impairs judgment and increases impulsivity, leading to the perception that life's stressors and challenges are unconquerable. Even if a solution doesn't seem visible, getting help can make a difference and save a life. Sailors are some of the most skilled problem solvers there are, and that well-deserved reputation has been earned through dedication, strength and resilience. Seeking help is a sign of strength, and finding effective ways to navigate stress and drink responsibly can help you Keep What You've Earned. For more campaign information, click here.

News You Can Use

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Keep What You've Earned Navy.mil Video

Need a good laugh today? Check out this cartoon by Jeff Bacon, Creator of Broadside: “Complicated”