

SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE
COUNTY OF SUFFOLK

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Dear Editor,

Suicide is a tragedy that often goes unaddressed in our communities even though it is a major cause of preventable, premature death in the U.S. and across the world. In the last few weeks, this topic has come into the spotlight with the tragic passing of actor Robin Williams. The issue has also been brought to my attention through the work I have done with a local organization, Adam's Hope House Foundation, which was recently established in loving memory of Adam, a young man who passed in 2013. Such painful losses are sad but important reminders of how precious and fleeting life is. As September is National Suicide awareness month, I would like to call attention to this issue by highlighting the preventative measures, signs, and support options available.

When putting the issue into perspective we see that suicide is the tenth leading cause of death, taking the lives of nearly 40,000 Americans every year, and is responsible for an additional 500,000 suicide attempts. We also need to be alert to the fact that suicide does not discriminate and the effects of it can be seen across all age groups, sexes, races, and classes.

While we may never know what is going through someone's mind when they attempt or commit suicide, we do know that a combination of various psycho-social and environmental factors influence it. Knowing the signs that place a person at high risk of suicide is the first step in preventing it. Warning signs include, pulling away from family and friends, changes in eating and sleeping habits, changes in mood and concentration, use of alcohol or other drugs, giving away personal items, or speaking or writing about death. Stress factors such as financial hardships as well as difficulties with relationships are also contributing risks.

Major depression is the most common disorder linked to suicide, in fact, 15% of all people who are clinically depressed die by suicide. Warning signs may be subtle or overt, but if you feel that something is wrong with your family member or friend, it should be taken seriously.

Arming ourselves with as much information as possible and by banding together to increase awareness about the prevalence of suicide and other illnesses that often are found to be connected to suicide, we can be a positive force in the lives of those who are suffering.

Other suicide resources and hotlines include:

Response of Suffolk County - (631) 751-7500

Long Island Crisis Center - (516) 679-1111

Lifeline National Suicide Prevention Hotline - 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Sincerely,

William R. Spencer, M.D.
Suffolk County Legislator
18th Legislative District