

From: Katz, Ira R.

Sent: Monday, April 21, 2008 3:44 PM

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: [REDACTED]

Subject: RE: CBS News Request for Comment

Suicide prevention coordinators began systematic inquiries and tabulations at suicide attempts in the beginning of this calendar year. At the time of this letter, results were available for only one or two months, and there were and still are questions about how consistent or reliable the findings would be. Our earlier responses to you indicated that we could not release these numbers at the time.

In the attached email, I was asking if there should be a public release of this information, or whether we should first do more to confirm the findings. In fact, we have been evaluating these findings and confirming them since then.

Based on information from the National Death Index, there are approximately 140 suicides per month among those cared for by the veterans Health Administration. On the basis of epidemiological data on a predominantly male, predominantly older patient population it is reasonable to estimate that the ratio of suicide attempts to completed suicides may be approximately 10:1. Based on this estimate, the tabulation of 1000 cases per month is likely to represent a slight underestimate of the total number of attempts. However, the ratio of attempts to completed suicides may be as high as 25:1, and the actual number of attempts may be substantially higher.

From a clinical and public health perspective, however, what is important is that VA is identifying a substantial number of people who have survived suicide attempts. This is an important group for focusing specific approaches for suicide prevention. In this sense, the identification of substantial numbers of patients who have survived attempts provides important strategies for preventing repeated attempts and deaths by suicide.

The number of approximately 18 suicides per day is based on information on the proportion of suicides in America that occur among veterans according to information obtained by the CDC's National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS), and made public by CDC. It reflects NVDRS's findings that approximately 20% of the 32,500 suicides that occur in this county each year are among veterans.

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