



A Division of Hartford Hospital

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Institute Of Living Receives \$1M Grant To Research Suicide Prevention

HARTFORD – The Institute of Living (IOL) has received a \$1 million grant to research suicide prevention.

Time is precious when someone is admitted to the Institute of Living (IOL) after attempting suicide, making tailored, effective intervention key to warding off future attempts.

That's the impetus behind a three-year study launching under the direction of Dr. David Tolin, director of the Anxiety Disorders Center and Center for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) at the IOL. Called "Inpatient Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to Reduce Suicide Risk Post-Discharge," the study is funded by a \$1-million grant from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention.

"We only have people for a very brief period of time," Dr. Tolin noted. "This study is specifically investigating brief cognitive behavior therapy to prevent successive suicide attempts for people who have already attempted suicide."

CBT is one-on-one counseling designed to help clients think about things in different ways, solve problems more effectively and regulate their emotions more effectively, he said. Through the study, clients hospitalized at the IOL will receive

four private sessions complete with interventions specific to those with suicidal tendencies.

Currently, clients hospitalized at the IOL receive pharmacotherapy and group therapy. Group sessions are designed to help them understand why they are in the hospital while developing better coping strategies to use in the future. But, Dr. Tolin said the groups consist of all clients, not just those who are in the hospital after a suicide attempt.

“We have preliminary data showing that we can significantly reduce suicide attempts if we provide the right treatment in a very focused way,” he explained. “The proposed CBT is very focused on suicidal behavior.”

Counseling sessions, for example, might include guiding clients to shift their perspective and instead of thinking about reasons for dying, to think about the reasons they have for living. Writing these reasons down and even collecting special mementoes to remind them of their reasons to live can help change their perspective and refocus their energies.

“This shift in perspective also helps teach them new ways to behave,” Dr. Tolin noted.

The grant includes consultation services from Dr. David Rudd, who originated the concept of inpatient CBT sessions for suicidal clients. Dr. Rudd will train IOL staff to conduct the focused sessions.

“It’s rare for a hospital to offer such focused interventions,” Dr. Tolin said. “This is groundbreaking. We know about CBT in the outpatient setting but this is the first time it will be used in an inpatient setting.”

The new study, noted Dr. John Santopietro, physician-in-chief of Hartford HealthCare’s Behavioral Health Network, which includes the IOL, dovetails nicely with the Zero Suicide Initiative introduced system-wide in 2017 to establish more focused assessment and follow-up care for people at risk for suicide.

“We have been keenly focused on providing clients with the tools to prevent suicide and suicide attempts. This research will hopefully broaden the approach we and other institutions can take to helping people,” Dr. Santopietro said, adding that the IOL is a leader in mental health research on a number of fronts.

The study starts recruitment in January 2020 and will enroll 200 patients over three years. One hundred will receive the CBT.

For more information on mental health services offered at the IOL, go to www.instituteofliving.org.

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