

SUICIDE IN MODERN IRELAND
NEW DIMENSIONS, NEW RESPONSES

Advocacy & The Aftermath
Saturday Afternoon 13 November

**SUICIDE IN MODERN IRELAND:
THE 3TS PERSPECTIVE**

Presenter: **Prof. Kevin Malone**
3Ts Science & Education Co-ordinator
Dept. of Psychiatry & Mental Health Research
St. Vincent's University Hospital / UCD

Introduction by: Ciara O'Connor, Console (Bereaved by Suicide Foundation)
and Geoff Canavan / 3Ts

Prof Kevin Malone: I am delighted that so many people have showed up and attended the conference over the last couple of days. It is not easy to make your way to the centre of Dublin to hear more about the tragedy of suicide in modern Ireland. I think that some of the interest has come from the title that we chose which is "New Dimensions, New Responses". There is quite a feeling and air of desperation around the country, which is fuelled by a certain amount of nihilism and negativity and it seems like there is a feeling that there are no answers and therefore we probably shouldn't try doing anything about the problem. However, the reality from some of the knowledge that we have heard at this conference from some of the international data and also my own experience with regard to both clinical services and international research literature is that there are many answers and in fact there is hope. The challenge for Ireland is to embrace that hope, push on rapidly with regard to both highlighting the problem of Suicide in Modern Ireland and also developing tailored intervention strategies that are going to make a real difference in the next three years, not in the next ten years. So my presentation today is titled: "The 3Ts Perspective".

Background:

Some of you might wonder where 3Ts came from. Our initial notion was that the word suicide had such negative connotations in Ireland that if we put together any kind of organisation that had the word Suicide in the title, it was going to turn away or shut down people who up to now had not given the problem of Suicide in Modern Ireland any serious consideration. And so, the title 3Ts was born which stands for

Turning the Tide of Suicide
T T T S
3Ts

People say: "What's the 3Ts?" and we say: "Actually, it's about *Turning the Tide of Suicide*" and suddenly you are into a conversation that was not expected and it draws responses from people who previously had not had to deal with the problem of suicide themselves, but actually might be willing to help.

- Awareness, Education, Research & Support
- Inclusive - anyone who is willing to Help
- Action - sustained and comprehensive
- Urgent Statutory and Voluntary Response
- **"Can do, will do, do it now"**

The 3Ts organisation is a group of people from a variety of backgrounds but we have a common purpose and that is as I say what it says on the tin, so to speak. We are interested and eager to Turn the Tide of Suicide in Modern Ireland. We decided that we would focus on raising awareness, education, research and support. We also decided that we would be inclusive. In other words, anyone who is willing to help was welcome. We also thought that action was important, rather than rhetoric and that this action should be sustained and comprehensive and focussed and based on best practice and available knowledge. We also felt that there was an urgent statutory and voluntary response required, that this was not something that could just be left to be "done in the

next 10 years". I suppose collectively the organisation had a "can do, will do, do it now" type attitude which is probably important.

We decided to see if we could engage some of the higher profile organisations and charities and institutions that would have a bigger name nationally to bring to bear on the problem of suicide and so we included institutions such as:

St Vincent's University Hospital, Mater Foundation, Ireland Funds, Professional Golfers Association, The K Club, Holiday Inn Dublin City Centre (who have been fantastic, this whole weekend and previously in other ventures that we have done), Louis & Zelig Martin Foundation which has been incredibly supportive of our mission.

Rather than starting out from scratch, we thought it would be really important to embrace charities and organisations and voluntary groups that are out there at the coal-face helping those who have been affected by suicide or who are in a suicidal crisis or who are involved in research that might help those who are in suicidal crisis and so we included organisations such as

AWARE, Schizophrenia Ireland, Samaritans, National Suicide Bereavement Support Network, Irish Association of Suicidology, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Ireland Chapter, and research organisations such as National Suicide Research Foundation and a project that I have been intimately associated with the Ireland North South Urban Rural Epidemiologic Study of Suicidal Behaviour in Major Psychiatric Disorders (The INSURE Project).

3Ts Projects

Now I am going to talk a little bit about some of the research projects that I have been involved with in a little bit, but first of all, I want to say a word about the notion that people care. This picture here is of one of Ireland's great international sports stars, Padraig Harrington, who was more than willing to step up to the plate with regard to the problem of Suicide in Modern Ireland and in support of what the 3Ts is trying to do. His quote:



"Suicide – it's an undercurrent of our society that people don't like to talk about, but I'm sure there is not a family in Ireland that has not been touched in one way or another, directly or indirectly, by suicide".

Grass Roots Golf: This is a quote taken from the launch of the 3Ts Grass Roots Golf Competition which started in 2003, where over 40 golf clubs in Ireland all over the country took part. This year, 2004, over 10,000 people took part in this golf event from all communities of Ireland. The idea behind this image was to demonstrate that people who seem to be involved in very positive aspects of life and success etc are actually concerned and responsive to the crisis that people at the other end of the spectrum are struggling with and we believe that it is an image that gets a very positive message across that will hopefully make a difference. So the 3Ts Golf Project got in under the radar in communities across the country. Obviously, suicide has nothing got to do with golf, although golfers may disagree with that. But the reality is that generally speaking there is a golf club in most communities in Ireland and fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters, grandparents have all been touched by suicide in these communities and we felt it was important to try and reach out to as many communities as possible with the message that we all need to join hands to Turn the Tide of Suicide in Modern Ireland.

Particular thanks here goes to Mr Joe MacAvin for his organisation of the 3Ts Grass Roots Golf Event which is now coming up to its third year and is doing a terrific job on the awareness front.

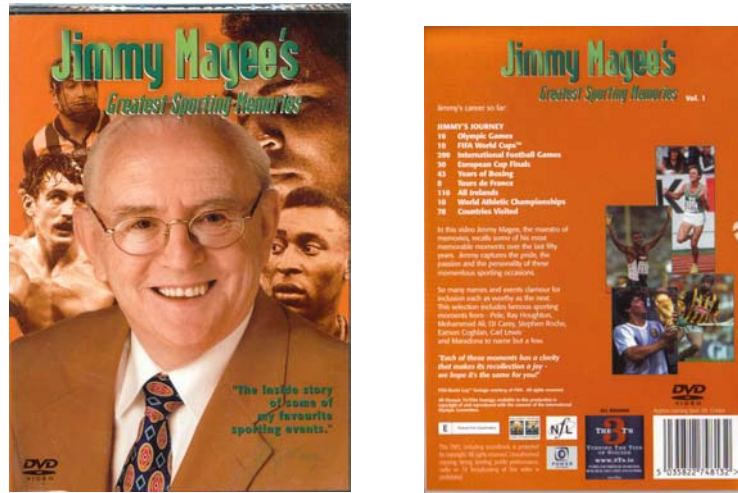
"Lecture" Series – Coping with and Surviving Depression:

We decided that it was important to focus not only on awareness but to also focus on education and support and to this end we put together a series of evening lectures and we adopted an "unplugged" model where we invited people who might be known to society who had been affected by depression and indeed suicidal depression, who were willing to come and share their experience of how they coped with and survived suicidal depression. We were very fortunate that our first lecture featured Prof Kay Redfield Jamison which gave us an immediate national profile because of her international recognition as a result of her very famous book "An Unquiet Mind" which speaks of her struggle with suicidal depression. We also were very fortunate that we had other contributors such as Johnny McEvoy, Gerald Mannix Flynn, Don Baker and Garrett O'Callaghan.

These "Lectures" took place here in the Holiday Inn Dublin City Centre on a Thursday evening and we had a phenomenal response from people who wanted to come and hear and bear witness to how one can survive and cope with depression. All of those who took part identified that it was a very positive experience, which is what the 3Ts were looking for.

We also decided to focus on a concept of Sports Support and we were involved in promoting Jimmy Magee's Greatest Sporting Moments, and here you can see the 3Ts logo on the back of Jimmy Magee's DVD / video (still on sale in the shops!).

Sports Support for The 3Ts:



Again, it is very important to get the message out about suicide in all communities and indeed all ages, that there are people out there who are eager to Turn the Tide. It is all about reaching out and breaking down barriers, particularly amongst young people and this video / DVD would have been an attraction to young people which is a group that we have to work very hard to reach out and communicate with.

www.3ts.ie

Next and in parallel, we put together a website www.3ts.ie, but here you can see the 3ts website

and it is constructed so that on the very front page, you can see one word which jumps off the screen, which is "Help" and that is the message that we are eager to convey, that we are eager to help. You can also see from the front pages that we have connection pages to the Samaritans and to Aware and then we have a news and events section which focuses on some of our lecture series, a little bit about the golf events and then the sports support. Then under Friends, Parents and Professionals we have links to different pages there and we are constantly working on updating this site. Again,

we think it is something that is very important in terms of visibility and in terms of getting the message out because there are so many people who are trying to get different messages out, so it is very important to be on the worldwide web.

Candlelight Vigil: World Suicide Prevention Day



**World Suicide Prevention Day, Sept. 10th 2004
3Ts Candle-Light Vigil,
Bank of Ireland forecourt, College Green, Dublin**

This slide shows a very evocative moment in the evolution of The 3Ts and this is what we put together for World Suicide Prevention Day on 10th September 2004. Anyone who managed to be at this event will have experienced the profound sense of emotion that was associated with this Candlelight Vigil that we put together in the Bank of Ireland Forecourt in College Green, Dublin. We were delighted that the first candle was lit by Mr Sean O'Ceallaigh, President of the GAA, on behalf of all communities of Ireland. A moment's silence was observed, the Dublin Male Welsh Choir as did a string quartet and over 300 people were in attendance. It was a highly significant event for those who were present. It was also a very important event because it received huge national publicity through the newspapers and it raised the profile, raised awareness and raised questions. We were also delighted that President Mary McAleese sent a message of hope and good wishes to this event and this was read by our chairman, Mr Noel Smyth.

Suicide in Modern Ireland: New Dimensions, New Responses

Moving from awareness and into the knowledge domain, we felt it was very important that there should be an accelerated platform of knowledge and because of the lack of knowledge with regard to suicide in Ireland, we thought it was important to bring those who had been actively involved in research internationally to the Dublin conference. We called the conference Suicide in Modern Ireland: New Dimensions, New Responses. We had a specific model, which was "leave your ego at the door" and it was going to be a conference devoted to talking and listening. We hoped that we would be able to reach out to a new audience to present new ideas, both international and local. We also thought it was very important to hear new voices from the arts and humanities and that it would be a sharing, new knowledge type experience. I am delighted to say that so far this seems to have been the case.

Research:

A brief word about our own research. Firstly, and very importantly, with regard to young people, this is a study that I was involved with Carol Fitzpatrick and Sharon Bolger, my research co-ordinator, in relation to Reaching out to Young People with Suicidal Depression. I think it is all very well for people in their '30's and '40's to talk about the younger generation but it is very important to hear the voice of the younger people. This research project was designed to follow-up young people aged 16-24 years who had presented a suicidal crisis at the Mater Hospital Dublin. We decided to follow them up 6 months later to ask them two particular questions:

1. How were they doing 6 months later?
2. How did we perform at the time of their suicidal crisis 6 months earlier and was there anything we should have been doing differently?

I am going to summarise the findings because it was a very intensive study. We tracked down 85 young people who had been in suicidal crisis 6 months previously.

- Young people in Suicidal Crisis need "*Someone to talk to*" - face-to-face
- Special services for suicidal young people
- Include Young people in the Service
- Transient feelings and ambivalent ideation
- Young people's views need to be heard

To a man or woman, all of them said that they felt young people needed someone to talk to face to face at the time of a suicidal crisis. I suppose this is particularly interesting from a phone line point of view. One of my concerns is that once you hang up the phone to a help phone line is that you are on your own again. The advantage of face to face is that it is completely different therapeutic interaction and in my opinion has far more long lasting consequences.

Young people also thought that there should be special services for suicidal young people. That to me makes an awful lot of sense.

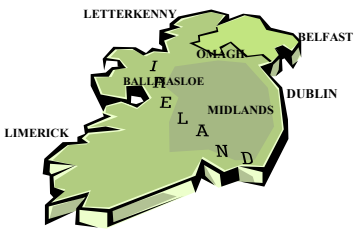
Interestingly, young people thought there that there should be young people in the service. This can be fleshed out to their notion that it was important for them at the time of suicidal crisis to see other young people who had been through a suicidal crisis and had made it out the other side and were alive. This directly refers to John Mann's concept of the "second chance". It is very important to see that people can get through suicidal crisis and can be afforded a second chance and can make something of that second chance.

The young people also reported that it was important to draw attention to the fact that the suicidal feelings were transient and that the suicidal ideation was not fixed firm and unshakeable and was actually ambivalent, so it actually fluctuates, comes and goes.


Finally, the young people suggested that young people's views need to be heard. I could not agree with that more.

Insure:

INSURE RESEARCH SITES & STUDY DESIGN



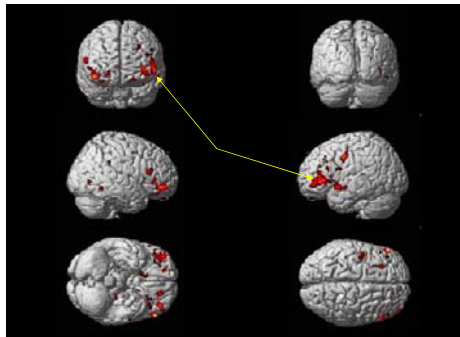
- Year 1 (n = 450)
 - New Referrals to Psychiatric Services
- Year 2 (n = 1,500)
 - A & E Suicidal Crises (Psych. Emergencies)
 - A & E Controls
- Year 3 (n = 80)
 - Completed Suicides (Psych. Autopsy)
 - Control Deaths
- Follow-up Study (n = 2,020)



Just a brief word about the INSURE Study, which is the Ireland North South Study. We have researches on the ground in Belfast, Dublin, Midlands, Ballinasloe, Letterkenny and Omagh. We have interviewed over 500 new referrals to psychiatric services. We have also interviewed over 1500 patients who presented to A&E in a suicidal crisis and we also intend to do an interview of families who have been bereaved by completed suicides, but more about that in a minute.

I want to show you a little study that we have done which is very different to the psycho-social domain and this is the bio-medical research.

Figure 1. Word Generation in Healthy Volunteers 1st 15 seconds, (n=6, p<0.01)



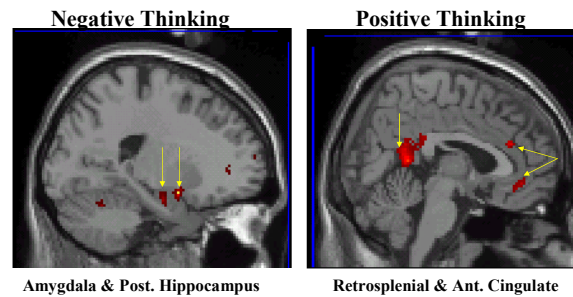
Note activation in Broca's Area

Malone *et al* (2003)

This slide shows what happens inside the brain of a group of six young people who were asked to come up silently with words generated in their head over a 15 second period. Here you can see that the word generation area of the brain becomes active. This is a study that we did in the Mater Hospital.

The next slide is a stunning representation of what happens when healthy volunteers think about negative things and positive things that are likely to happen in the future. Completely different brain pathways have been activated.

Figure 2. Future Thinking in Healthy Volunteers:
(n=6, p<0.01)



Malone *et al* (2003)

Here you can see on the left slide, when our healthy volunteers were asked to think about negative events that are likely to happen in the future, two major structures were activated, the Amygdala and the Posterior Hippocampus. The Amygdala is commonly known as the brain "seat of fear" and the Posterior Hippocampus is associated with memory. So this slide suggests that to think negatively about the future, one experiences a fear response and also an activation of past events, which will shape how you think about the future.

When we had healthy volunteers thinking positively about the future, we activated completely different brain area. Here you can see the Anterior Cingulate has been activated which is associated with problem solving and also the Retrosplenial Cortex which is associated with relaxation, reflectiveness and mindfulness.

We plan to now carry this study into patients with suicidal depression, thanks to a grant from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention who were very excited by this early work.

Suicide Survey:

Now let's move on to our most urgent challenge and that is to move from awareness to knowledge. Very briefly, since the turn of this millennium, there have been over 2000 deaths by suicide in Ireland and there is an enormous knowledge gap. The big question is who are the people and who are the lives behind these statistics? We are proposing a Suicide Survey in Modern Ireland to urgently harness this knowledge and as President Mary McAleese mentioned at her opening address, put the pieces of the jigsaw together so that we can come up with new knowledge that will be critical towards the development of focused and targeted intervention and prevention strategy. So our plan is from late spring '05 to the autumn of '06 to put together a team of interviewers to focus on 1000 lives lost.

3Ts

One Mission

Help us to Help Ireland to Turn the Tide of Suicide.

In summary, despite our efforts, suicide stigma is still underestimated and is very powerful. We believe this stigma is fostered by ambivalence, nihilism, fear and grief. Therefore there is a need to educate and influence all of society but particularly the policy makers. I think it is important to explore different models of putting out a positive message. For example, the "Live Strong" campaign led by Lance Armstrong has given great encouragement to young people and has become almost a badge of honour and so we believe that we need to tap into that "Life Energy" component, which I believe is significantly at large in young people. I also believe that young people are very concerned about other young people dying by suicide. We believe that there should be a sustained, skilled awareness campaign across the life cycle and across statutory and voluntary agencies in science, arts and humanities and through communities and the message should be quite clear

This is everybody's problem, not somebody else's problem.

We are very eager to rapidly move from awareness to knowledge and we are convinced that the Ireland Suicide Survey will fill an enormous gap in our knowledge, if you like, the so-called *Lives behind the Numbers*.

Finally, there is no question about it that there is a giant expertise gap in modern Ireland when it comes to helping people at a time of suicidal crisis and it is obvious that there should be 24/7 expertise available to help people in their time of suicidal crisis. Obviously you want to help them at an earlier point in the evolution of the suicidal process but for the moment we have got to help people in their time of suicidal crisis and this help has got to be available from Achill Island to Ailesbury Road. Nobody should be excluded.

It is very important for me to acknowledge several people who have made an enormous contribution to 3Ts and in particular the 3Ts conference, in particular the conference committee of Ms. Fiona O'Brien Lavin and Ms. Lise Alford who have just opened their hearts and made an enormous personal and organizational contribution to making the conference the success it is. I would like to acknowledge all the Contributors and Chairpersons who voluntarily contributed to the conference without charge. I am sure all of you will agree that the Holiday Inn Dublin City Centre have been enormously welcoming and supportive of all of us at this conference. I am very grateful to Johnny Moran and all the staff, especially Trevor, Sabrina and Helena who have been discrete, professional and very sensitive. We thank you. I would like to thank all our other Sponsors and Supporters. I would very much like to acknowledge and thank our 3Ts Chairman, Mr. Noel Smyth whose vision, energy and determination have brought about this conference today.

And finally... word about "dinner". In my view, dinner is not just about breaking bread, it is about meeting one another, exchanging stories, experiences and creating a unique bond. I hope you enjoy the dinner we have prepared to you this evening and I leave you with the most compelling 3Ts dinner of 2004 which was captured on World Suicide Prevention Day 2004. Thank you for your attention.

