

Suicide prevention tips for pharmacies

Your awareness and vigilance could help save a life.

Pharmacy staff have frequent interactions with patients and are ideally situated to help prevent death by suicide. Pharmacists, techs, and cashiers can keep a watchful eye on patients who may be at risk, observe signs of distress, and facilitate connection to help.

5 steps pharmacists can use to help patients who are contemplating suicide



1. Look for warning signs in patients:

Take all signs seriously.

Change in affect

- Seems out-of-sorts or disheveled. May exhibit a change in behavior, anger, moodiness, hopelessness, or depressed affect

Comments & verbal clues

- Talks about feeling trapped
- Mentions being a burden to others. "My family would be better off without me."
- Asks concerning questions: "What would happen if I took too much medication?" or "Can you recommend something for sleep?"
- Comments or jokes about suicide: "Pretty soon, you won't have to worry about me." "I'm tired of life." "I just want out."

- Discloses a recent crisis, death of a loved one or other setbacks

Behavior & symptom changes

- Experiences chronic pain, recently received a diagnosis of a chronic, debilitating, or terminal illness
- Sleep or appetite issues
- Increased use of alcohol or substances
- Nonpersistence with antidepressants or other medications
- Stockpiling pills or acquiring guns



2. Listen & show empathy:

"You don't seem yourself lately. Is there anything going on that you can talk to me about?"

- If possible, speak to the patient directly in a one-on-one consultation regarding any identified concerns
- Listen carefully when a patient shares struggles and/or suicidal thoughts
- Offer compassion, not advice. Avoid judgment. Do not make assumptions about what YOU think makes their life worth living
- Acknowledge their unique experience: "That sounds frustrating." "Thank you for telling me."
- Assure them that you care, and help is available. "I'm here to support you."



3. Ask about suicide:

It's OK to ask. Doing so will NOT plant the idea in someone's mind.

"Sometimes, when people feel the way you do, they think about suicide. Is that something you have thought about?"

- Don't wait - ask the question. If you are unable to do so, ask your manager to assist you immediately
- If the patient is reluctant to answer, keep trying with another approach
- Listen carefully and then offer to call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline with them at (800) 273-TALK or text the Crisis Text Line by texting 'MT' to 741-741
- Persuade them to get help. Calling their primary care provider and 2-1-1 are great places to start



4. Remove dangers:

Putting time & distance between someone at risk for suicide & lethal means can save a life.

- If they say yes, ask, "Do you have a plan?"
- Ask if they have access to lethal means such as stockpiled Rx or a firearm
- If yes, suggest they remove or lock them up or any other means. Ask if someone they trust can hold onto those items. "How can we keep you safe for now?"
- Please direct them to a medication dropbox or other safe Rx disposal methods. You can also inquire about firearms in the home and offer a gun lock
 - Consider limiting medication to weekly quantities and/or using a blister pack for dispensation
 - If there is a risk of imminent danger such as harm to self or others, call 911 and ask for a Crisis Intervention Team-trained officer to assist you



5. Collaborate with their health care team & refer to care:

"Can I contact your doctor/therapist to tell them how you've been feeling lately?"

- Contact the patient's provider to share information about suicidal thoughts, behaviors, or mental health changes. It is best to get the patient's permission beforehand
- If they don't have a provider or identify other needs, you can call 2-1-1 or visit [Montana211.org](https://montana211.org) to find local resources

Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800-273-TALK (8255)

For Veterans Press 1

Available 24/7, the Lifeline can help you help others



Crisis Text Line text 'MT' to 741-741

Montana 211: Visit montana211.org or call 2-1-1

Trevor Project - LGBTQ (866) 488-7386

Learn more and request free gun locks and Deterra at <https://bit.ly/SaferCommunitiesMT>