

## **Suicide in the Military**

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I keep reading articles in the Army Times concerning the record suicide rate in the Army and efforts to boost counseling. I was even interviewed by a writer for the Army Times and some of my opinions appeared in the 16 February issue.

I am troubled when I read these articles because I do not feel that the active components put enough emphasis on programs that already available to members of the military.

This problem is very dear to my heart. I am a retired Sergeant Major, United States Army, and I currently run a volunteer Crisis Hotline in Beaver County Pennsylvania. Over the years, we have found that people contemplating suicide need someone who will listen to them, not someone who will try to solve their problems. As a retired Sergeant Major, I know that we are tempted to "fix" the problem when a soldier comes to us and try to get that soldier back to the field. I did not find out until I took my present position, how many times I could have really helped a soldier by just listening while he or she talked to me.

The 16 February Article discussed the loss of Maj. Gen. Mark Graham's son to suicide and the story of SPC Larry Curtis Applegate's suicide. Spc. Applegate could still be with us if he had known about a local crisis center number, or the 1-800-273-TALK number. We have been part of many incidents where a person on the verge of suicide was brought down from crisis and allowed us to send a Mobile Mental Health Crisis Team to assist him/her rather than the police. I also believe that Gen. Mark Graham might have his son right now.

There was also discussion in an article about a "5 year, \$50,000,000.00 study". How many soldiers will die while this study is taking place

Many times a soldier, or family member, would rather talk to an anonymous person on the phone, rather than a friend, fellow soldier, others in his/her chain of command, or the chaplain. The 1-800-273-TALK National Lifeline System, and local Crisis Centers, meet that need.

I would like IAVA to help me get the word out to the Active Components and Guard and Reserve units about the 1-800-273-TALK line and local crisis centers. I would like to see billboards and signs on every military post advertising the TALK number and local crisis lines. I am sure if Fort Carson had let their soldiers know about the 1-800-273-TALK number and the crisis line in Pueblo, CO we might have avoided two suicides.

Please, lets get the word out and stop thinking that soldiers will discuss suicide with their "buddies", their chaplain, or their chain of command.