



Showcasing Solutions

CALM – Reducing Access to Lethal Means

The Problem

Reducing access to lethal means for a person at risk of suicide could make the difference in whether they live or die. Lethal means are the substances, weapons, or things that can cause death by suicide. Removing access to lethal means when someone is thinking about suicide may interrupt an attempt and provide time for an intervention. Many suicide attempts occur with as little as 10-15 minutes of planning during a short-term crisis.¹ Of attempters who survive, 90% do not go on to die by suicide later.²



The Solution

CALM (Counseling on Access to Lethal Means) is an intervention that seeks to increase the time and distance between individuals at risk of suicide and the most common and lethal methods of suicide. It teaches why lethal means matter and what those closest to at-risk individuals can do to limit access.

Children's Wisconsin has incorporated CALM into their organization. Dr. Jennifer Zaspel, Assistant Professor/Medical Director, Emergency Mental and Behavioral Health – Medical College of Wisconsin/Children's Wisconsin, leads Children's Wisconsin's CALM implementation. She says **their approach is two-pronged: 1) education and 2) safe storage devices.**

Children's Wisconsin has provided CALM training to staff in many of their areas. They started with child adolescent psychiatry, pediatric emergency medicine, and their medical social work team and have since expanded to support nearly every medical space. The training focuses on lethal means restriction and is used when screening identifies a youth at risk of suicide. "In these situations not only do our practitioners refer to mental health treatment services, but they focus on lethal means restrictions that parents can do right away, when they get home," Zaspel said.

Children's Wisconsin doesn't stop there. The second prong in their CALM initiative is providing safe storage devices free of charge. The devices they offer families include cable locks, trigger locks, lock boxes, and biometric lock boxes. "Families have different needs, whether that is to restrict medications or

fire arms, so we want to get the right means restriction devices in their hands," said Zaspel. And they typically offer the devices in that very visit, when the child has been identified as at risk.

Children's Wisconsin CALM focus in on youth ages 10-18. They do universal mental health screening of youth almost system wide. If the screen shows the youth is at risk, the practitioner asks additional questions and a social worker or mental health clinician is called in to complete further assessment and determine the next safest steps in care, which is most often care in the community. Together with caregivers and patients, a safety plan is created, allowing those families to go home with actionable steps to keep their child safe.

The Results

To date, Children's Wisconsin has trained over 125 of their staff in CALM. And through a partnership with Aspirus Health, 225 total health care practitioners have been trained across Wisconsin.

"We have had great feedback from trained staff," Zaspel said. "I heard from one practitioner who said they took the CALM training in the morning and used it that very afternoon."

Zaspel says it is a large responsibility for practitioners to take on behavioral assessments, and many commonly say the **CALM training was the best and most impactful training they had taken.**

¹ Deisenhammer EA, Ing CM, Strauss R, Kemmler G, Hinterhuber H, Weiss EM

² [Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health](https://www.hhs.gov/ohrt/reports-and-publications/2017/05/20/harvard-t-h-chan-school-of-public-health)