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SUICIDE

A cry for help

By Barron Jamel Green

The number of suicide attempts at Fayetteville State University increased from 2010 to 2011. While suicide is the second leading cause of death for college students nationally, it is also "100 percent preventable," according to researchers.

Last academic year (2010-2011), there were eight recorded suicide threats at FSU. This year alone there were two suicide threats, and five suicide attempts which led to hospitalizations. The numbers of threats and attempts are roughly equal by gender.

Furthermore, all threats and attempts at FSU were recorded in the months from August to October, according to researchers from the Center for Personal Development at FSU. It is unclear why the numbers spiked during those months, but pressures and stress associated with college, which starts up in August, seem to coincide with the increase.

The data on suicide attempts at FSU was presented to the Board of Trustees at its March 22 meeting.

The national issue of suicide is a controversial topic that is sweeping colleges and universities across the nation. The average number of suicides on college campuses is 1,100 annually, making it the second leading cause of death among college students, according to researchers.

"Thankfully we [at FSU] have not lost a student to suicide in quite some time, but we do know that colleges all over the country are facing increased numbers of students with more severe mental health problems entering college as a result of

easier access to psychiatric medications," according to Dr. Samantha Daniel, an assistant professor in FSU's psychology department.

In response, the FSU Center for Personal Development and the Department of Psychology are partnering to create a comprehensive suicide prevention program, which includes student screening and faculty training, Daniel said.

Daniel and four other faculty members in FSU's Department of Psychology, including Dr. Mei-Chuan Wang, Dr. Laura Coyle, Dr. Kimberly Tran, and Dr. Pius Nyutu received a grant from the Morehouse School of Medicine's HBCU Center for Behavioral Excellence to provide training to faculty to counteract suicide attempts. Morehouse partners with Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, SAMHSA, a national organization created to lower the incidence of suicide and enhance services for individuals struggling with depression, substance abuse, and other behavioral health problems that put them at risk of suicide.

The term "Suicide Gatekeeper" was used to illustrate the responsibilities of those who will later receive the training and utilize their skills in the FSU community. Training sessions began earlier this year and have included residence life staff as well as other FSU faculty and staff.

"The goal is to train 250 influential students, faculty, and staff to recognize signs of distress and respond appropriately to students at risk of suicide or experiencing mental health

issues," Daniel said.

Confidential depression screenings will be offered to students during FSU's health fair on April 20, according to FSU's Center for Personal Development. After the screenings, students will receive immediate feedback and encouraged to seek assistance to address their concerns.

FSU's Division of Student Affairs and University College, Division of Academic Affairs are also partnering in the suicide prevention initiative.

In other business, Board of Trustee member Terence Murchison informed the board about an upcoming performance review of the chancellor by an outside consultant.

Also, FSU is forging a partnership with Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Oakridge University to provide FSU students with internship opportunities in the area of national security. Three students are currently interning at MIT and two students are interning at Oakridge. On April 2, FSU will hold a national security symposium.

The board also heard a presentation about what is being called the "Millennial Mile," a university project to buy properties between FSU and downtown Fayetteville to enhance exposure to the university. The old Washington Drive school site has already been demolished as part of the project and other properties on Murchison Road are being evaluated for demolition and eventual expansion.