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FRONTLINE WORKERS TO BE TRAINED TO RECOGNISE MENTAL DISTRESS AS PART OF NEW SUICIDE PREVENTION PLAN

Frontline staff in Wales such as teachers, employment advisors and police will be trained to assist people displaying signs of mental health problems under a new action plan to reduce suicide and self-harm to be announced later today.

Statistics show that almost three-quarters of people in Wales who die from suicide are unknown to mental health services in the year prior to their death.

A central part of the action plan will therefore aim to increase awareness of mental health issues in environments where frontline staff frequently come into contact with those with such problems.

Staff in workplaces including schools, Jobcentre Plus offices, healthcare settings like GP surgeries, police stations and prisons, and support workers in voluntary and community groups will be among those receiving training.

The intention is that frontline staff will be better able to identify someone experiencing mental health problems and be more confident in providing initial support and signposting the person towards more appropriate help.

The training programme – Mental Health First Aid – is based on a successful scheme first rolled out in Australia and which has been adopted in Scotland.

Evaluation of the programme has shown that frontline staff felt more confident to intervene in situations where people were displaying signs of mental distress.

The programme will now be rolled out across Wales – funded through Welsh Assembly Government– as one part of the action plan.

A Welsh Assembly Government source said:

“A key objective of the action plan will be to raise awareness and understanding of mental health issues so that those at risk can be identified at an early stage and support provided earlier than has often been done in the past.

“Frontline staff in a wide range of workplaces working outside the mental health environment will frequently encounter people experiencing mental distress.

“Often, mental health specialists only come into contact with people further down the line. The Mental Health First Aid programme aims to ensure that more people receive ‘first-aid’ for their problems more immediately, with signposting to appropriate support.

“The plan will also seek to raise understanding of mental health issues amongst the wider public in order to de-stigmatise the issue and make it easier for those with problems to seek help.”

Welsh Assembly Government Health Minister Edwina Hart announced earlier this year that an action plan would be developed to establish new initiatives and pull together existing programmes to provide a co-ordinated approach to suicide prevention.

The full action plan will be published later today.

On average, 300 people die by suicide each year in Wales – a lower rate than Scotland or Northern Ireland but higher than England – with the rate remaining static over the last decade.