



## Suicidologist encourages members to reconnect

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9/18/2011 - **MANSFIELD, Ohio** -- Dr. Mary Bartlett, a Suicidologist, was in Mansfield on Sept. 17, 2011, to speak with members of the 179th Airlift Wing about the importance of reconnecting with each other and their personal support systems. "You don't need a PhD to save lives," she told the audience.

Bartlett was brought to the base at the request of Col. Gary A. McCue, Base Commander, after an alarming number of recent completed suicides Air Force wide and two completed suicides involving members of the 179th AW and the 200th RED HORSE Squadron in the past year. As the spouse of a retired Air Force member, Bartlett is well aware of the pressures and stresses military members face both at home station and while deployed.



Dr. Mary Bartlett, a Suicidologist, briefed the commanders of the 179th Airlift Wing on Sept. 17, 2011, on building resiliency and connecting with their troops. Bartlett has over 16 years of experience as a Suicidologist and works with Air Force and Air National Guard units across the nation. (US Air Force Photo, MSgt Lisa Haun)(Released)

"You really can't prevent suicide unless you know how someone gets there," she said, noting that one in six people think about attempting suicide at some point in their lifetime. She said that people who think about committing suicide or attempt it do not really want to do it, they simply feel that they cannot carry their burdens any longer. "They just don't know what to do with the pain," she noted.

To help people who feel this burdened, Bartlett said that members need to have open lines of communication. People need to feel that they have someone who they can talk to without retribution. Often the best people to be in the lines of communication are coworkers and supervisors.

"The Wingman concept cannot be a flash in the fry pan," Bartlett stated. Whether the Air Force ever decides to change the concept to a different name, she urged members to remember that they must be there to recognize warning signs in their coworkers and friends. Additionally, they must be ready and willing to ask the tough question, "Are you thinking of committing suicide?" if someone is exhibiting signs of trouble.

Bartlett quoted Dr. Edwin Shneidman, founder of the American Association of Suicidology, by saying, "How willing am I to be inconvenienced by a person's response to two questions: Where does it hurt and how can I help?"

In addition to debunking the myth of suicide being committed by people who want to die, Bartlett also said that suicide is not impulsive and cowardly. "We are not wired for suicide," she said, noting that people are ingrained with the desire to survive at all costs. To commit suicide, someone must overcome this aspect of human nature and plan for how they will end their hurting.

People who attempt to commit suicide have told several people about the problems they are experiencing and how they feel overwhelmed. Often times though, they tell each person only a small part of the trouble they feel and the pieces are not connected until it is too late to help. This is where good communication can be key, according to Bartlett. When concerned family and friends talk to one another, they may possibly be able to connect dots to determine if a member is in danger of hurting themselves.

While we all know to watch out for members who show signs of wanting to commit suicide, Bartlett encouraged members to not overlook others who may be affected by an attempted or completed suicide. Each suicide affects an average of six to 28 people, according to statistics Bartlett gave. Often first responders and personnel who must process the scene of the suicide are affected whether they know the individual or not.

Survivors of an individual who has committed suicide also experience a wide, varying range of emotions beyond

the normal grieving process. For instance, they may have a hard time accepting that they may never know why the person decided that they could not continue with the load they were carrying. Bartlett noted they may also suffer the accusation of others or feel that they are not receiving adequate support. "You just need to be with the survivors," she said, adding that you may not have the answers to all their questions or may feel awkward with the situation, but they need someone to be with them.

When dealing with someone who is thinking about committing suicide, Bartlett encouraged members to engage with the individual. She said that many times just talking about what they are experiencing is enough to ease the pressure someone feels. "Never underestimate the power you have when you put your hand on someone's shoulder and say, 'You make a difference,'" she concluded.