Exploring Community Solutions
Why include faith communities in mental health care?

- Mental health issues affect people across faith traditions
- Faith leaders and faith communities are often “first responders” on the front-line
- Faith communities care for whole person and families
- We interact with people in diverse settings
- Congregations include people from diverse workplaces, including mental health professionals
- Mental health crises are also crises of faith
Barriers to seeking care in faith communities

• Beliefs that suicide violates faith community cultural/gender role norms
• Mental illness is a sin, moral failing
  • Suicide reflects lack of faith or weak faith
  • Suicide is a “white thing”
• Stigma associated with mental illness
Barriers to seeking care in faith communities

- Distrust of mental health professionals
  - Will try to take away or ridicule faith beliefs
  - Aren’t trained to deal with faith beliefs in therapy
- Clergy know little about suicide lethality/risks
- Clergy less likely to make mental health referrals
- Ministries focus on “other-world” theology less likely to make referrals
Good News! Changes in Understanding Mental Illness

• Less religious stigma associated with suicide:
  • Actions judged on basis of competency - being of “sound mind”
• Mental illnesses seen like other diseases - not a reason for shame, guilt, or a sign of God’s disapproval
• The silence is being broken and clergy see their role as partners with other mental health professionals
Protective Factors Faith Communities Can Provide:

• Cultivating Wholeness:
  • Connection and Community: “Mattering”
• Education
• Narratives of Hope
• Worship Experiences
• Advocacy
Community

- Foster a sense of connection and “mattering”
- Create sense of community inside and outside the faith location
Educational Opportunities:

What Does the Bible Say About Suicide & Mental Illness?

National Black Church Conference
June 18, 2015
Sherry Davis Molock, Ph.D., M.Div.
George Washington University

Bible Study:
Singing in a Strange Land:
Combatting Depression & Suicide

THURSDAY’S “THURST” FOR TRUTH
BELOVED COMMUNITY CHURCH BIBLE STUDY

INSTITUTE FOR HEALTH POLICY FORUM

#SuicidePrevention #KPIHP

KAISER PERMANENTE
Narratives of Hope

- Faith traditions are built on stories of people overcoming adversity and finding meaning in life’s hardships

Stories from history

Stories from the community

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Worship as Pastoral Care

- Sermons, workshops & educational lessons on suicide prevention
- Sermons cover mental health challenges
- Telling our stories –
  - For example: focus in July on Minority Mental Health Month
- Each week church member “tells his/her story” re their own struggle with mental illness and/or family members
  - Autism Spectrum Disorder
  - Bipolar disorder, major depression, anxiety disorders, PTSD
- Suicide
Worship as Pastoral Care

• Information on Suicide Prevention on community tables, church website, Facebook page, Instagram

• List resources in weekly bulletin

• List resources on announcements in slides

• Treat prevention as social justice issue

• Send out invites for churches in area to participate in National Faith, Hope, Life weekend
Advocacy:
Helps change policy. Helps change the person.
Take Home Message: Faith Communities Are an Untapped Resource!

- It takes a village: caring for persons with mental illness and for their families and loved ones takes partnerships.
- Family communities and faith leaders are an important part of the village and offers many inherent protective factors.
- Faith communities and faith leaders need training, resources but also acknowledgment of the unique gifts they offer in helping people become whole.
Resources

• National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention Faith Communities Task Force: theactionalliance.org/task-force/faith-communities

• American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: afsp.org

• Suicide Prevention Resource Center: sprc.org

• CDC Suicide Resources: cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/resources.html