

# Surgeon General NOTAM RISK MANAGEMENT LESSONS

16 AUGUST 1999

The following Notice to Airman (NOTAM) is released by the Clinical Quality Management Division, Air Force Medical Operations Agency, (AFMOA/SGOC) to disseminate critical information and lessons learned from medical incident investigations, sentinel events, malpractice claims and adverse actions.

**ATTENTION:  
THE FOLLOWING IS AN OFFICIAL SG NOTAM  
PLEASE PRINT, READ, AND DISSEMINATE TO ALL MTF  
PERSONNEL.**

## **99-009: SUICIDES OF AIR FORCE MEDICAL SERVICE PERSONNEL IN 1999**

The rate of suicide in the Air Force is at an all-time low. Implementation of suicide prevention initiatives by the Air Force Suicide Prevention IPT has been instrumental to this success. Despite the overall success, a disturbing trend is evident. Four of the seven suicides in 1999 were medics: one officer and three enlisted individuals. This stands in stark contrast to the proportion of medical personnel to the total force: one in twelve enlisted personnel and one in five officers. Traditionally, the number of suicides involving medics is very low when compared to the total. Since the numbers are small, they do not allow for statistical analysis, but some common threads do stand out. All were experiencing a combination of the most common difficulties associated with suicide: relationship, financial, and legal problems. Two-thirds of the people that commit suicide have one or some combination of these difficulties.

**Medics need to be even more vigilant when evaluating another medic. Familiarity and over-identification can affect objectivity and decrease assessment of suicidal risk.**

Medics know the suicide risk factors, problems, and profiles; however, applying that knowledge objectively to peers and co-workers is difficult. When a co-worker or peer displays behaviors that indicate they are at-risk for suicide, extra care must be taken in assessing that person. Medics do not have special skills that immunize them from

suicide. Because they are peers and co-workers, one is more likely to give them the benefit of the doubt. It is incumbent on all medical personnel to increase their vigilance and objectivity to ensure fellow medics receive the same high quality attention afforded to all patients.

Point of contact is Lt Col Nicolas, AFMOA/SGOC, DSN 297-4061. This SG NOTAM is posted on the AFMOA/SGOC home page at <http://sg-www.satx.disa.mil/moasgoc/index.htm>