

Grant funds jail suicide intervention

Brown University and Michigan State University will share a \$6.8 million federal grant to test an intervention to reduce suicides among people being released from jail.

PROVIDENCE— Suicide risk is high among people in jail and even higher during the transition when they return home. With a new \$6.8-million grant, researchers at Brown University and Michigan State University will test whether a new intervention can help preserve the lives of people who are going through the system, often with mental health and substance abuse difficulties.

In the Suicide Prevention for at-Risk Individuals in Transition – SPIRIT – trial, the researchers plan to enroll 800 detainees as they leave either the Rhode Island Department of Corrections jail in Cranston or the Genesee County Jail in Flint, Mich. Participants will randomly be assigned to either standard care or the Safety Planning Intervention, conducted by trained community mental health center providers. Among people receiving both types of care, researchers will track improvements in suicidal behavior and psychiatric and substance abuse outcomes, as well as their use of community services and their re-arrest rates.

LAUREN M. WEINSTOCK, PHD, associate professor (research) of psychiatry and human behavior in the Alpert Medical School of Brown University, and **JENNIFER**

E. JOHNSON, the C.S. Mott Endowed Professor of Public Health at MSU's College of Human Medicine, are co-principal investigators on the study. Johnson is also an adjunct associate professor at Brown.

"We will be evaluating the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of a Safety Planning Intervention, with telephone follow-up to problem-solve around stressors and to promote safety and community service utilization during the post-release period," said Weinstock, a clinical psychologist at Butler Hospital. "Given that roughly 10 percent of all suicides in the United States with known circumstances occur in the context of a recent criminal legal stressor, reducing suicide risk in the year after jail detention could have a noticeable impact on national suicide rates."

The four-year grant comes from the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Institutes of Health Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research, and the National Institute of Justice. ❖



Lauren M. Weinstock, PhD

BROWN UNIVERSITY

Southcoast targets region's high AFib rate with prevention program

NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS — Southcoast® Health recently launched a comprehensive Atrial Fibrillation Wellness and Stroke Prevention Program, designed to help identify high-risk patients and streamline their access to care, while offering them the tools to help prevent risk factors through education, exercise and lifestyle changes, and social supports.

The population of the South Coast region has a particularly high rate of AFib, said **NITESH A. SOOD, MD**, electrophysiologist at Southcoast Health.

The program aims to educate patients and the local physician community – including emergency department doctors and primary care physicians – to quickly diagnose and treat risk factors in patients and streamline a patient's referral to a cardiologist.

Because AFib can increase a patient's risk of stroke, the Atrial Fibrillation

Wellness and Stroke Prevention Program will assess patients' stroke risk and offer appropriate preventative medication or therapy, such as blood thinners. Additionally, Southcoast is among the first hospitals in New England to offer a new treatment option, the WATCHMAN Device. WATCHMAN is implanted in the heart as an alternative to blood thinners, for patients who may be experiencing problems with bleeding or who don't want to be on anticoagulants long-term.

Southcoast Health also performs advanced procedures to treat AFib – such as Cryo-ablation and Convergent Hybrid Ablation – but early identification is important. "The longer Atrial Fibrillation goes untreated, the worse it gets," Dr. Sood said. "If you are a candidate for the procedure, it should be done as soon as possible."

"While we have these procedures,

what really needs to happen is lifestyle modification to help with outcomes or to prevent patients from coming to us later needing these procedures," he added.

The patients in the Atrial Fibrillation Wellness and Stroke Prevention Program receive a three-month supervised fitness and exercise program at a minimal cost. The wellness initiative also includes:

- Regular support groups and a social media platform to share experiences
- Yoga and meditation classes
- Nutrition and cooking classes
- Access to a physician on call, 24/7

Additionally, Southcoast Health will collaborate with a sleep apnea program. "We will be able to have a sleep study done within 48 hours of a patient being seen in our program, to quickly diagnose and treat people with sleep apnea," Dr. Sood said. ❖