

Blythedale Initiates Youth Suicide Screening

Blythedale Children's Hospital has implemented a new suicide prevention, screening and risk assessment program.

The Westchester County hospital is in a unique position to identify warning signs in pediatric patients and proactively route them to appropriate mental health professionals because of its post-acute care focus, said Dr. Scott Klein, chief medical and clinical services officer at Blythedale.

Thoughts related to self-harm or suicide are more likely to be observable in this setting, where pediatric patients often stay from six weeks to many months.

The hospital is using evidence-based tools, including checklists and algorithms, and making sure its staff is comfortable asking questions at intake and throughout the patients' stay.

"The important thing we needed to get people past was that asking does not suddenly put ideas into people's heads," Klein said.

Suicide has become the second-leading cause of death for children, adolescents and young adults, from 5 to 24 years old, with kids suffering chronic pediatric illnesses experiencing an increased suicide risk, Blythedale said.

The new screening program has been "amazingly well received by the staff, but actually the families too," Klein said.