Jail Suicide Detection and Prevention

Line of Business: Legal Professional Liability

Risk Control Strategy/Key Issues: To be observant to the threat of suicide among inmates and to directly intervene in suicide threats or actions whenever reasonably possible. Establish and maintain a proactive position to reduce the number of Jail deaths as a pro-active stance to neutralize liability

Suggested Program Elements:

1. Operations Policy: A policy should be in place that informs deputies of the procedure for the intake of inmates. The admittance and processing of inmates should be efficient and orderly manner to include verification to confirm the legality of their confinement, medical needs, appropriate classification, and determine their suicide potential. The policy should also allow for the close supervision of inmates that have been determined to be a suicide risk.

   The policy should also define suicide prevention roles and staff responsibilities. The operations policy should include at a minimal:
   
   - Definitions and descriptions of potential detainee “At Risk Behavior” that could indicate potential attempts to commit suicide should be outlined in a Suicide Risk Classification System.
   - Initial booking screening procedures should include behavior Observation for “At Risk Behavior”, identify and document Risk Factors as being Present or not present, and determine if there have been any past suicide attempts.
   - Detainee placement instructions must be based on suicide risk classification. If the indications are that the detainee is an “At Risk” individual transportation to a local healthcare provider, previously arraigned for, that has psychiatric treatment facilities should be made.
   - Suicide risk referral process should include quick transfer of high risk detainees, and follow up with hospital on a regular basis as to their status.
   - Reporting procedure for high and medium risk detainees should include informing family members, facility supervisors and other officers.
   - Suicide response plan should include emergency medical response to the facility, first aid plan which sets procedures and responsibilities for staff and sworn officers, and availability of rescue equipment and first aid supplies.

2. Administrators and Management Responsibilities: These responsibilities must be clearly defined in the written operations policy. This section of the policy should include:

   - Mandate compliance with State or National Correctional Institution Standards by reviewing the facilities ability to comply with or exceed recommended controls; and to review procedures to insure compliance and adherence to applicable policies and procedures.
   - Implement documented monitoring methods to determine if the policy and procedures are properly followed.
   - Provide for remedial disciplinary actions against those found not to be complying with policies and procedures up to and including dismissal. If union contracts exist these disciplinary procedures for violations should be included in the next arbitrated contract.
- Establish training protocol for all personnel on changes in procedures. Procedures should be updated and continuing in-service training provided at least annually to all operational and management personnel.

3. **Training:** All deputies should be thoroughly trained in suicide evaluation and prevention. This training should be continual and documented and include:
   - Use of and, understanding of, the Departments Suicide Profile characteristics. Establish profile screening as a benchmark to be used as a procedure during the booking process.
   - Have a mental health professional review the signs and symptoms of potential suicidal behavior with all personnel.
   - Establish policies and procedures to check detainees on a regular basis even if they do not fit the profile. Check especially those individuals that are being detained for the first time. These individuals nationally have shown that they have the potential to attempt suicide.
   - Document all procedures, observations, detainee checks and other activities used to insure the safety of detainees with they are in custody.

4. **Possible Indications:** Possible indicators of potentially suicidal inmates include past history of suicide attempts; active discussion of suicide plans; sudden drastic change in eating, sleeping, or other personal habits; recent crisis in personal events, such as extended or life sentencing; and loss of interest in activities or relationships the inmate had previously engaged in.

5. **Procedure:** As part of the admission process an evaluation should be done to determine the arrestee’s suicide potential. This process should also include a discussion with the arresting deputy regarding comments that the arrestee may have made. Once the evaluation is completed it should be reviewed by on staff medical personnel or on-call physician. If the interviewing deputy suspects that the arrestee may be a suicide risk, the person should be put on watch until a complete evaluation by medical personnel is conducted. When it is determined that an inmate exhibits suicidal tendencies the on call physician (medical personnel) and Jail Administrator (highest ranking officer) should be notified. Written reports of any suicide attempts should be forwarded to the Jail Administrator.

If an inmate exhibits suicide tendencies after incarceration the same process should be performed. The on call physician (medical personnel) and Jail Administrator (highest ranking officer) should be notified, and the inmate should be placed on suicide watch in accordance with the facilities policy.

6. **The Watch:** All potentially harmful items such as razor blades, belts, shoelaces, matches, pens, pencils, mirrors, glasses, and any sharp items will be removed from the inmate and the cell in which he or she is placed. If necessary, paper gowns may be substituted for normal facility clothing. This suicide watch can be on a continuous basis or with frequent checks of at least every fifteen minutes. The officer will visually observe the inmate during each inspection and document that he did and any concerns he may have. Closed circuit television can be used instead of the inspection if the facility is so equipped. If this is used, the officer must be able to see the inmate on the monitor and hear the sounds in the room through periodic checks. Documentation should be maintained on all observations.

7. **Should an Attempt Succeed:** See Trident Risk Points Operational Policies and Procedures “Post Jail Suicide Interview” guide.
Program Activities Calendar:
- Audits of all jail procedures first quarter
- Annual audits of facility
- Monthly training updates

Web Site Links:
- United States Department of Justice
  http://www.usdoj.gov
- U.S. Bureau of Prisons
  http://www.bop.gov/

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