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Cork-Kerry programme aims to tackle depression and suicide

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A pilot programme aimed at combating suicide and self-harm and enlisting close to 400 doctors and 1,000 community facilitators has been launched in Cork and Kerry.

The programme has the potential to form part of the national strategy to combat suicide and deliberate self-harm, a leading figure in Irish suicide research said at the launch yesterday.

National Suicide Review Group chairman Geoff Day said the project, launched by the Cork and Kerry Alliance for Awareness of Depression and Suicidal Behaviour, could provide useful insights in the development of a national suicide strategy.

The pilot programme was developed by the National Suicide Research Foundation in conjunction with UCC and the HSE,

southern, mid-western and south eastern areas. It is based on a similar project in Nuremberg in Germany where over a two-year period, it had resulted in a 26 per cent reduction in suicide.

Dr Ella Arensman said the project would follow the four-level approach used in Nuremberg by implementing measures with general practitioners, acute

patient groups, community facilitators and the general public.

GPs will be invited to participate in specialist workshops focusing on depressed and suicidal patients. Acute groups will receive increased support through the provision of emergency cards and leaflets providing information on relevant services.

Community facilitators such as

social workers, priests, gardai and teachers will be informed about depression and suicidal behaviour and offered workshops. An awareness campaign using posters, leaflets and advertisements will address the general public.

The alliance hopes to contact all 400 or so GPs practising in Cork and Kerry. They have already canvassed 185 about work-

shops on suicide prevention.

The project also involves providing emergency cards to accident and emergency departments at Cork University Hospital, Mercy University Hospital and the South Infirmary in Cork and Kerry General Hospital for those presenting after self-harm.

The project is likely to cost €300,000 to €400,000 over 18 months. The group has already received €30,000 from the EU, €58,000 from the Health Research Board and €10,000 from the Irish College of General Practitioners.

Cork GP Dr Paddy Ryan told the seminar that his practice had dealt with seven definite suicides and three possible suicides from a population of 1,600-1,800 people in the past six years.

Irish studies showed that between 3 per cent and 15 per cent of those who committed suicide had



Dr Ella Arensman at the seminar in Cork on depression and suicide yesterday. Photograph: Michael MacSweeney/Provision

seen their GP in the previous week while 30 per cent to 40 per cent had seen them in the month before committing suicide. This highlighted gaps in the current service, he said.

Dr Breda McLeavey, principal clinical psychologist at the department of psychiatry at UCC, said studies showed that for every suicide, 15 people were self-harming

and 20 per cent of those would go on to repeatedly self-harm.

She revealed that 70 per cent of 440 patients treated at Cork University Hospital and Limerick Regional Hospital after self-harming over the past four years had agreed to go on a course to develop problem-solving skills. Eighty per cent of these had completed the course.

Inquest told of woman's suicide

A young woman hanged herself hours after leaving a Dublin hospital's A&E ward, an inquest heard last night. The 20-year-old, who had been suffering from depression, was found by her mother hanging in her bedroom in June 2004.

The inquest heard she had been brought by ambulance to the Mater's A&E ward for assessment at around midnight the previous evening

amid worries over her state of mind. Her mother complained that the hospital never alerted her after she left before being treated. A nurse, Iomar Fernandez, told the Dublin City Coroner's Court that the young woman asked to go for a cigarette after the ambulance crew handed her over.

However, he said, there was no sign of her when he went to look for her after a few minutes.