

After suicide attempt, a phone call could save a life

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(HealthDay)—A simple phone call can make a big difference to

someone who's attempted suicide and may be contemplating another try.

A new study found that follow-up [phone](#) calls after a suicidal patient was discharged from a [hospital emergency department](#) reduced future suicide attempts by 30 percent.

The study included nearly 1,400 patients in eight locations across the United States who were provided with interventions that included specialized screening, safety planning guidance and follow-up phone calls.

"People who are suicidal are often disconnected and socially isolated. So any positive contact with the world can make them feel better," said study co-author Dr. Michael Allen. He's a professor of psychiatry and [emergency medicine](#) at the University of Colorado Anschutz.

Allen is also medical director of Rocky Mountain Crisis Partners in Denver, which has implemented a similar program where counselors call suicidal patients following their discharge from [emergency](#) departments.

Simply giving a suicidal patient a psychiatric referral when discharged isn't enough, he said.

"We call them up to seven times to check on them after discharge. If they aren't there we leave a message and call again," Allen said in a university news release.

"We don't need more brick-and-mortar buildings, we can reduce suicide risk by simply calling people on the phone," he added.

"This is a remarkably low-cost, low-tech intervention that has achieved impressive results," Allen said.

Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. In 2015, there were more than 44,000 deaths by suicide. Over 1 million people attempt [suicide](#) every year in the United States, the researchers said.

Dr. Emmy Betz is one of the study's co-authors. She's also an associate professor of emergency medicine at the university.

"Telephone follow-up programs offer a great way to help bridge an ED [emergency department] visit to outpatient mental health care and hopefully save lives," Betz said.

"It would be great to see such programs become more widely implemented. Suicide is a leading cause of death, especially in Colorado, and a shortage of inpatient and outpatient [mental health care](#) options make innovative approaches like telephone counseling even more attractive," she said.

The study was published recently in the journal *JAMA Psychiatry*.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [suicide prevention](#).

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