

newsRELEASE

From Choose Life

29th June 2006

Choose Life Welcomes New Press Guidelines on Reporting Suicide

Choose Life, Scotland's national strategy to prevent suicide, has today welcomed the decision by Press Complaints Commission (PCC) to introduce a new clause to the Editor's Code of Practice to address media reporting of suicide.

Caroline Farquhar, Head of Implementation for Choose Life said "This is a really positive step forward. There is significant evidence from around the world showing that irresponsible reporting of suicide, providing a detailed description of methods used, can lead to copycat behaviour.

This decision by the Press Complaints Commission will help ensure that there is more informed reporting of suicide in the future. Suicide prevention is a public health issue and responsible media reporting can help save lives".

Choose Life joined other organisations, including Samaritans, to campaign to have the Code of Practice amended to include a clause about the reporting of suicide.

Chief Executive of Samaritans, David King said today: "This is really significant news from the Editors Committee. We have been working well with the media for many years and for the Committee to put something into the Press Complaints Commission Code, which we know is what reporters work to every day, is a great step forward".

Supporting the media is one of the objectives of the Choose Life strategy in Scotland. This recent development highlights the progress being made in this area. In 2004, Choose Life worked collaboratively with the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) Scotland and the National Programme for Improving Mental Health & Well-being to develop a practical guide for journalists on the reporting of mental health and suicide by the media.

Caroline Farquhar added “Whilst there are still some examples of poor media reporting, this is more often that not due to a lack of awareness and understanding of the issues. We are however starting to see a real difference in the way that suicide is being reported, which is extremely helpful and demonstrates the commitment of the media to address this very real public health issue ”.

The PCC has announced that the change will take effect from August 7th 2006.

To ensure maximum awareness, the Society of Editors will print and send out 30,000 copies of the new Code to UK journalists, politicians and leaders of civil society.

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Notes to Editors:

- Choose Life is a 10 year strategy and action plan aimed at reducing suicide in Scotland by 20% by 2013. It was launched in 2002 and forms part of the Scottish Executive’s National Programme for Improving Health and Well-being in Scotland and is part of the overall health improvement and public health efforts. For more information, visit the website on www.chooselife.net
- The Choose Life strategy and action plan sets out a framework to ensure action is taken nationally and locally to build skills, develop training, encourage people to seek help early, improve understanding of ‘what works’ to prevent suicide, and encourage partnership working amongst services.
- The new sub-clause to Clause 5, *Intrusion into Grief and Shock*, now reads:-
- *“*5ii: When reporting suicide, care should be taken to avoid excessive detail about the method used. (The asterisk indicates that under the new sub-clause exceptions can be made if editors demonstrate that it was written in the public interest)”*.
- The most recent version of the NUJ guidelines for reporting mental health and suicide in the media can be downloaded from the Choose Life website at www.chooselife.net. The Samaritans have also developed media guidelines, which also can be downloaded from the Choose Life website.
- The following agencies and organisations are available to contact for information, guidance or support when reporting on suicide and wider mental health issues:
 - Choose Life: Scotland’s National Strategy and Action Plan to Prevent Suicide
www.chooselife.net
 - The Scottish Executive’s National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-being:
www.wellscotland.com
 - See me: A campaign set up to challenge stigma and discrimination around mental ill-health in Scotland
www.seemescotland.org.uk
 - National Union of Journalists Scotland
0141 248 6648, www.nuj.org.uk