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EDITORS CODE OF PRACTICE PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Significant worldwide research consistently links certain types of media reporting of suicide with increases in suicide rates. Inappropriate reporting can have a negative influence on the behaviour of people who may be vulnerable. For example, reports which include detailed descriptions of a suicide method can lead to more deaths using the same method, and dramatic or romanticised coverage of a death by suicide can lead to vulnerable people over-identifying with particular characteristics of the person who has died and this may influence their decision to take their own life.

Since losing our son to suicide 5 years ago we have been actively involved in working to prevent suicide through a number of different ways including the charity Papyrus – Prevention of Young Suicide, and are therefore concerned about how the reporting of suicide can influence vulnerable people.

Therefore, we would like to suggest some changes to clause 5 of the Editors' Code of Practice, in order to strengthen the code and ensure more responsible media reporting, thus minimising the risk to vulnerable people.

Clause 5 of the Editors' Code:

*"When reporting suicide, to prevent simulative acts care should be taken to avoid excessive detail of the method used, while taking into account the media's right to report legal proceedings."*¹

Recommendations

- 1. To remove, or at the very least replace, the word 'excessive' in relation to the level of detail on suicide methods reported to ensure detailed descriptions of suicide methods are not included in reports.**

While it is now very rare to see excessive detail, it is extremely concerning that detailed descriptions containing sufficient information to clearly illustrate suicide methods are frequently reported. This level of detail increases cognitive awareness of specific suicide methods and can therefore contribute to increases in their use.

- 2. To add that specific method should not be mentioned in cases involving novel or unusual and/or highly lethal suicide methods, including in the reporting of inquests.**

In its current form the Editors' Code of Practice is not robust enough to prevent the introduction and growth of new and emerging suicide methods in the UK. There is strong evidence demonstrating how new methods have caught on in some countries following widespread and detailed newspaper reporting, resulting in significant growth of these novel methods and increasing suicide rates overall.

¹ IPSO Editors' Code of Practice <https://www.ipso.co.uk/editors-code-of-practice/>

- 3. To add that care should be taken to avoid generating coverage that is extensive, prominent or sensational – including stating the suicide method in the headline, speculation on causes and photographs of known suicide locations. Particular care should be applied in cases involving young people, who are at increased risk of contagion and celebrities, where the risk of contagion through over-identification is greater.**

In addition to reporting details of suicide methods, research also links prominent, sensational coverage of suicides with increases in suicide rates. For example, in the case of celebrity or high profile deaths, where the risk of contagion through over-identification with the person who has died is increased. Young people, especially those who have been impacted by a suicide, are particularly susceptible to the risk of contagion. It is also unhelpful to oversimplify, or trivialise a suicide by suggesting a single cause. Suicide is a very complex issue and is rarely, if ever, as a result of one single cause.

- 4. Greater care must be taken to avoid signposting vulnerable people to harmful content online, including videos showing suicidal behaviour including self-harm, guidebooks and websites which give instructions on suicide methods and promote suicidal behaviour, or any content which glorifies suicidal behaviour in any way.**

Widespread news reporting of suicidal behaviour and harmful material available online, can encourage people to search the internet to view such content. The press should be reminded of its responsibilities under the code and as a trusted source of information. While we are aware that harmful content is available in the online environment, including social media, studies have shown increases in people viewing such material following widespread news reports which inadvertently signpost readers to these. Editors should give greater consideration to whether it is appropriate to run such stories.

- 5. Sources of support should always be included when covering the topic of suicide, and self-harm, such as Papyrus' 'HOPELineUK' or Samaritans' 24hr helpline.**

People can be significantly impacted by reports covering sensitive topics including mental health and suicide, therefore news articles should always signpost readers to sources of support. People do call Papyrus or Samaritans having been affected by something they have read in a newspaper or magazine. Encouraging people to reach out for support in this way could help prevent suicides.