

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please find attached a response to the consultation on changes to the Code from the Health Committee in the House of Commons.

I'd be grateful if you could confirm receipt of this submission.

Kind regards,

Katya

Katya Cassidy
Second Clerk, Health Committee

House of Commons Health Committee

1. In the course of its inquiry into suicide prevention, the Health Committee received over 175 written submissions¹ and heard oral evidence from a range of organisations, key stakeholders, and bereaved families.² The Health Committee published an interim report in December 2016 and will be publishing a full report soon.³

2. Suicide is the biggest killer of men aged 49 and under⁴ and the leading cause of death in young people of both sexes aged 15–24.⁵ The Committee heard, during the course of its inquiry, about the dangers of irresponsible media reporting, due to the risk of imitative behaviour. We are pleased that the sub-clause on the reporting of suicide was added into the Editors' Code of Practice to ensure that excessive detail of method should not be included when reporting suicide.

3. However, Samaritans told the Committee that 'any mention of the method [of suicide] carries the risk of increasing public awareness'.⁶ This is of particular concern where a new and emerging method of suicide is concerned. Even some detail about a suicide method could result in imitative behaviour.

4. The evidence which we have heard in the course of our inquiry has led us to support Samaritans' conclusion that the term "excessive detail" in Clause 5 of the Code should be replaced with "unnecessary detail", to ensure that public awareness of methods of suicide is not increased. That change should be made following this consultation. "Unnecessary detail" includes, but is not restricted to, detail of new and emerging methods of suicide, of particular online sites used, or of locations where individuals have taken their own lives. These types of details pose an even greater risk of imitative behaviour.

5. We recognise the media's right to report these incidents but argue that in the vast majority of these cases, specific detail about the way in which an individual has taken his or her life or speculation about their reasons for doing so is not required for accurate and informative reporting of an incident. However, it does add to the risk to other vulnerable individuals. A prohibition of "unnecessary detail" should not, and is not intended to, restrict the press' freedom to report but would help to encourage media reporting to take place in a way that does not add to the risk of imitative suicide.

¹ Health Committee, Suicide prevention, written evidence

² Health Committee, Suicide prevention, oral evidence

³ Fourth Report of Session 2016–17, *Suicide prevention: interim report*, HC 300

⁴ Office for National Statistics, <http://visual.ons.gov.uk/what-are-the-top-causes-of-death-by-age-and-gender/>

⁵ Office for National Statistics, Death registrations summary tables, 2015

⁶ Samaritans (SPR0072)