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Idaho needs more help

On behalf of the Blaine County Community Drug Coalition (BCCDC), I'd like to thank Della Sentilles for her thoughtful and well researched article on Idaho's suicide rate. As Ms. Sentilles noted in her article, more than 90 percent of people who die by suicide have depression or another diagnosable mental illness or substance addiction. Tragically, mental illnesses that are undiagnosed can lead to self-medication, which leads to substance abuse, and sometimes, suicide.

I know this to be true. My brother took his life after years of crack-cocaine addiction, as well as alcohol and marijuana abuse. Although he wasn't diagnosed by a physician, his family believes he was bi-polar—he was never treated. He did, however, self-medicate. He was 14 years old when he started using drugs. He didn't receive the help he needed. In Idaho, people often don't know how to find help, or where to turn.

In her report, Ms. Sentilles listed a number of resources where people can find help. However, none of these are suicide specific for Idaho. Idaho's suicide prevention hotline was closed in early 2007. Since that time, there has not been a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week suicide crisis service. Recently, our coalition learned about efforts being made by Idaho State University to sustain funding for an Idaho Suicide Crisis Hotline. If funded, the ISU project will research and develop infrastructure, design policies, procedures and protocols, recruit and train staff and market the hotline to Idahoans statewide. Our coalition supports this funding.

On July 9th, Science Daily reported that ending even moderate alcohol consumption can raise (lower?) the risk of depression and inhibit the brain's ability to produce new neurons by reducing the number of neural stem cells. Scientists have discovered that treating mice with an antidepressant drug for the first 14 days of abstinence seemed to prevent depressive symptoms and restore the brain's ability to make neurons, a finding that could have application in treating individuals with alcoholism and depression. People who experience depression need some place to turn to find out why they are experiencing these feelings, how chemical brain imbalances can lead to destructive behavior, including suicide, and they need to know how to find help closest to them.

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