

To: All Providers
From: PerformCare
Date: May 2, 2022
Subject: Suicide Prevention Memo #5: Fluid Vulnerability Theory

The following bi-monthly communication for the clinical treatment of clients with chronic suicidal thinking flows from our March communication on core competencies. This will address the concept of Fluid Vulnerability Theory and how it can be used as part of an assessment of high-risk states for suicide. One could posit that knowledge of Fluid Vulnerability Theory is a needed therapeutic skill in managing clients with chronic suicidal thinking and ongoing assessment of risk.

Fluid Vulnerability Theory in short reflects that high risk states vary frequently, and are highly individualized based on a complex interaction between affective, physiological, cognitive and environmental factors for each person with suicidal thinking. Individuals with chronic suicidal thinking have a suicidal mode, which becomes activated at times of high risk. Use of Fluid Vulnerability Theory is a mechanism for understanding suicide risk over both short and longer periods of time and it is grounded in Cognitive Therapy. This theory helps the clinician to understand when a person's suicidal mode becomes activated, and whether the episode is acute or passive. Episodes of suicidal thinking are time limited and based on how long the suicide mode is active. Knowledge of these factors for each client helps the clinician to understand the acuity of risk, how one episode relates to another and the severity of risk across the noted four domains. Further, using this model helps the clinician to understand the factors that triggered the episode of risk, as well as the severity and duration. Each person's vulnerability is variable, but identifiable and are able to be quantified as high to low with use of this theory.

Note: The original reference for Fluid Vulnerability Theory is listed below. For free access to an article that addressed this concept you can go to <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7050543/>

References

Rudd, M. D., (2006). Fluid Vulnerability Theory: A Cognitive Approach to Understanding the Process of Acute and Chronic Suicide Risk. In Ellis, T.E. *Cognition and Suicide: Theory, Research and Therapy* (355-368). American Psychological Association.