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Medical College of Wisconsin Veteran Outreach Program Helps Prevent Suicide with Firearm Safety Initiative

Gun Shop Project and Safe Storage Program Provide Local Gun Shops, Ranges with Prevention Support

Milwaukee, May 6, 2021 - The Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program, on behalf of the Southeastern Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Taskforce and BeThereWis.com, is bringing the Gun Shop Project and Safe Storage Program to local communities across Wisconsin.

The program, developed by Safe Communities of Madison-Dane County, works with Wisconsin gun shops and ranges to provide two levels of support to the gun-owner community that address firearm suicides:

- 1) **Firearm safety:** Gun shops will provide materials to customers and staff about suicide prevention and responsible firearm ownership developed by the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), American Foundation on Suicide Prevention, and the VA.
- 2) **Firearm storage outside of the home:** The gun shops will provide temporary safe storage of a firearm for a low fee. This service will assist individuals that are in a crisis to voluntarily store their firearm outside of the home.

These types of programs have been successful in New Hampshire, Colorado, Washington, and parts of Wisconsin. Research shows that 70 percent of veteran suicides are by use of a firearm, and more than half of suicides are not due to mental illness.

“Many people that die by suicide might be going through a divorce, job loss or missed promotion, or simply feeling hopeless in a dire moment,” said Chris Swift, Veteran Peer Specialist with the Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program. Swift is also a veteran.

“It can be within minutes that a person takes their life,” he adds. “Suicidal feelings can be temporary and the ability to offer time and distance between a person and lethal means can save a life.”

Interested gun shops and ranges can sign up to be listed as a member of the “Coalition of Veteran-friendly Gun Shops” on the Gun Shop Project and Safe Storage map at

BeThereWis.com. Once signed up, members will receive materials to assist in providing the services listed above.

For more information or to sign up, email the Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program at CaptainJohnDMasonProgram@mcw.edu, contact Susan Smykal at (414) 955-8914 or go to www.BeThereWis.com.

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About the Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program

The Captain John D. Mason Veteran Peer Outreach Program located at VeteranPeerOutreach.org was created in 2018 and named after a Vietnam veteran who lost his own battle with depression and PTSD. The program, in the Medical College of Wisconsin Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine in collaboration with the Milwaukee VA Medical Center, aims to save lives by locating veterans in need and engaging them in VA health services.

About the Medical College of Wisconsin

With a history dating back to 1893, The Medical College of Wisconsin is dedicated to leadership and excellence in education, patient care, research and community engagement. More than 1,400 students are enrolled in MCW's medical school and graduate school programs in Milwaukee, Green Bay, and Central Wisconsin in. MCW's School of Pharmacy opened in 2017. A major national research center, MCW is the largest research institution in the Milwaukee metro area and second largest in Wisconsin. In the last ten years, faculty received more than \$1.5 billion in external support for research, teaching, training and related purposes. This total includes highly competitive research and training awards from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Annually, MCW faculty direct or collaborate on more than 3,100 research studies, including clinical trials. Additionally, more than 1,600 physicians provide care in virtually every specialty of medicine for more than \$2.8 million patients annually.