



Suicide and the Net

It's a controversial topic, and one that has attracted its fair share of debate in the media in recent months. But exactly what role does the internet play in relation to suicide? Is it purely a negative one or can the internet be used for good?

THESE ARE JUST SOME OF THE ISSUES that were examined by national and international guest speakers, including representatives from popular social networking site Bebo and from the Irish Internet Providers Association, at a special seminar hosted by Rehab last August.

The "Suicide and the Internet" seminar was organised because of the high numbers of completed suicides and reported deliberate self-harm among 15 to 24-year-olds, an age group with a high internet usage.

The seminar formed part of the pre-conference programme for the

24th World Congress of the International Association for Suicide Prevention. The congress, which was hosted for the first time by the Irish Association of Suicidology, took place in the Irish National Events Centre in Killarney, Co. Kerry.

Rachel O'Connell, Safety Officer for Bebo, addressed delegates at the



Pictured above: At the 24th World Congress of the International Association for Suicide Prevention in Killarney are (centre) Collette Ryan of RehabCare and Dr John Connelly, Congress Chairman and Secretary of the Irish Association of Suicidology, with seminar speakers (left to right) Paul Durrant of the Irish Internet Providers Association, Emmet Ryan of ElectricNews.ie, Rachel O'Connell, Safety Officer for Bebo, Anthony Langan of the Samaritans and David Lester, Stockton University, Boston

seminar on the positive role of social networking sites and highlighted the future challenges in ensuring the internet is safe for young people. Paul Durrant from the Irish Internet Providers Association, who has been involved in finding and closing down a number of websites considered to contain inappropriate content, spoke about the legal and moral perspectives of his work, while Anthony Langan, of the Samaritans in the UK, explained its campaign to promote online options for vulnerable people.

The seminar also featured talks by international experts in the field of suicidology and included an open panel session chaired by Dr John Connelly, congress Chairman and Secretary of the Irish Association of Suicidology.

Rehab's Suicide Prevention Project Manager, Collette Ryan, says, "There has been much controversy in recent years about the negative and sinister role that the internet plays in the growing rates of suicide in this country, particularly among young people. While it is important that we are aware of the dangers of the internet, when it comes to suicide prevention, the internet also has an essential role to play in reaching out to the most vulnerable in our society – those who feel most forgotten and alone.





Pictured above: David Lester of Stockton University, Boston, speaking at the conference in Killarney



Pictured left: (left to right) Collette Ryan, RehabCare Suicide Prevention Project Manager, and Rachel O'Connell, Bebo Safety Officer, at the Rehab seminar "Suicide and the Internet" which took place in advance of the 24th World Congress of the International Association for Suicide Prevention in Killarney

"International research clearly indicates that the internet is increasingly being used as a source of information on a wide variety of health issues, including mental health. The anonymity and accessibility of the internet

may allay young people's concerns about seeking help, especially their fear about lack of confidentiality and a need for autonomy. Instant online counselling provided by trained personnel from reputable organisations, regulated web chats, youth-focused websites and self-help interventions are all valuable online resources that have a hugely positive role to play in preventing suicide and in promoting mental health."

Dr John Connelly says, "Given the importance of the internet for good or ill, the Rehab-hosted seminar was extremely topical. On the whole the internet is a tremendous resource for education and help on

issues relating to suicide and how to deal with them. It is a great information source on health issues and the promotion of positive mental health which is very important in any suicide prevention strategy." ■

Who to contact

For further information please contact:



Collette Ryan

Suicide Prevention Project Manager
RehabCare

(01) 205 7326
collette.ryan@rehabcare.ie