

1979 Author Reflections

Original contributing authors whose manuscripts were published in the 1979 issues of *Pediatrics in Review* were asked to look back and reflect on changes to the health topic and their career paths.



Management of Suicidal Drug Overdose

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Thank you for the opportunity to re-read what I wrote 40 years ago for *Pediatrics in Review* and to share a few personal reactions to this intriguing experience. Various questions arose for me while reading: *What is great mentorship? Has the experience of adolescence changed in recent years? Why is the suicide rate among adolescents steadily increasing since 2006?*

As a young adolescent medicine attending at Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx, I was fortunate to have Michael I. Cohen as my mentor. As my first research study, he suggested a retroactive chart review of the hospital's previous 10 years' policy to admit *all* adolescent suicide attempt survivors presenting to the ER to the non-psychiatric Adolescent Medicine Unit for further evaluation, rather than go directly to a psychiatric unit or be discharged home. My study resulted in a paper published in the *Journal of Pediatrics* with myself as the *sole author*. Michael stepped aside and let me independently set up the chart review then aided with my first ever manuscript. Overnight I became recognized as an "expert in adolescent suicide" with invitations to speak and write. My research interests changed course thereafter, but I will forever be grateful to Michael for stimulating my interest in research, public speaking and writing and, above all, showing me what it means to be a great mentor!

In 1979, suicide was the third leading cause of death among adolescents; more girls than boys *attempted* suicide but three times as many boys died. It is now the *second* leading cause of death among 10- to 34-year-olds and notably, since 2006, the rate has steadily increased for both genders, but *faster for girls*, with the sharpest rise lately among 10- to 14-year-old girls! **What's going on?** For one, girls are using more lethal means; sadly, in my own practice one girl hung herself and another jumped from the 14th floor. Both girls suffered from severe and unrelenting depression despite expert psychiatric care and devoted parents. It is rightly feared that *social media* (including cyber-bullying) has contributed to an erosion of self-esteem and wellbeing and a dramatic increase in depression and anxiety among teens. Does life feel especially precarious for girls? A financial crisis, political unrest, opioid epidemic, prevalence of firearms, perhaps unease regarding sexual identity, may all be contributing factors, as well. It is imperative, as the American Academy of Pediatrics has stressed, that pediatricians (who are often seen within weeks of a suicide attempt, usually for a physical complaint) always remain alert to the risk of suicide and annually screen all adolescents for depression. The challenge continues over these past 40 years and has never been greater.

Reference

1 "Suicide." *National Institute of Mental Health*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019. www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide.shtml. Accessed June 6, 2019.

Further Reading

Read Dr Marks' 1979 article, *Management of Suicidal Drug Overdose*: <https://pedsinreview.aappublications.org/content/1/6/179>

Compare to the 2015 PIR article, *Depression and Suicide in Children and Adolescents* <https://pedsinreview.aappublications.org/content/36/7/299>

Read [related articles and cases on Suicide, Suicide Prevention, and Depression](#)

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Dr Andrea Marks is a Senior Member of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Dr Marks is a graduate of Bryn Mawr College and the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. Her residency in pediatrics and fellowship in adolescent medicine were completed at Boston Children's Hospital-Harvard Medical School. Dr. Marks directed programs in adolescent medicine at North Shore University Hospital, Columbia Presbyterian, and New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center. Thereafter, in 1990, she founded the private practice Adolescent-Young Adult Medicine. Dr. Marks served as President of the Society for Adolescent Medicine during 2004-2005. In 2017, Dr. Marks' role at Adolescent-Young Adult Medicine (AYAM) evolved from one of clinical care to that of a consultancy to the practice she established.