

8 January 2010

VCSA SENDS: 2010 Suicide Rate

Leaders,

I am very concerned about early-year suicides that we are currently experiencing within the ranks. As of today, 8 January 2010, there have been 8 active duty suicides. January last year had 21 suicides--our highest month in recent history. We need to re-double our efforts to let Soldiers know we are concerned about their well-being.

I am asking the backbone of our Army, our NCO Corps, and other green-tab leaders and supervisors, to troop the line, walk through the motor-pool, stop by the barracks, eat a meal in the dining facility, and visit the guard post at midnight. Look each and every Soldier in the eye. Convey the message that each one is valued by our Army, their families and friends, and our Nation. Remind Soldiers that their Army remains committed to help, support, and assist them to meet hardships head-on, no matter the struggle, stressor, or challenge.

It is important for all Soldiers to know and understand their self worth and importance to our team. Having a feeling of self worth and pride in belonging to something bigger than yourself could be an important deterrent to suicide. While Soldiers face many stresses and life challenges, they must know that one of their most important contributions is serving as a member of our organizations. Every Soldier adds to the great diversity of our formations, and it is our leaders at all levels who find and unlock the hidden potential of every Soldier, empowering them to become part of our band of brothers and sisters.

We have made great improvements in the policies, programs, and initiatives related to health promotion, risk reduction, and suicide prevention. I am aware that we have conducted training, supported and educated Army Families, and worked tirelessly to combat the stressors that plague our Army on all fronts. Still, our efforts are ongoing. Our leaders, family members, friends and peers must continue to be vigilant in these efforts.

At the end of the day, no matter how much effort we spend on programs, how many changes we make to policies, or hours spent on suicide prevention training, our last and most potent line of defense remains our leadership.

GEN Chiarelli