

Let's Talk About Suicide, Again

By Tish Vincent

A groundbreaking conference was held April 7–9 at The Inn at St. John's in Plymouth. Hundreds of professionals and individuals gathered to discuss, educate, and advocate for survivors of the suicide of someone close to them. There were presentations on a range of topics, with the central focus on sharing information about suicide, interventions with those thinking of ending their lives, and various creative efforts to restore hope to all those touched by suicide.

The conference was the brainchild of Gail and John Urso, who lost their son, Kevin, to suicide in 2013. Their dream is for their charitable organization, Kevin's Song (www.KevinsSong.org), to be a place where "people can go to learn about the many excellent organizations that exist to help understand the causes of suicide as well as effective methods of preventing it."¹

Professionals who die by suicide

At this conference, I moderated a panel of professionals whose work includes treating or monitoring physicians, lawyers, and judges who struggle with mental illness or addictions severe enough to impair their ability to practice. Highly educated professionals have a higher rate of depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, and suicide than the general population. Those of us who work in programs offering services to these professionals know the statistics, but not why the rates are so much higher.

Thomas Joiner

Dr. Thomas Joiner, the Robert O. Lawton professor of psychology at Florida State University, was one of the presenters at the conference. Dr. Joiner has developed a theory of suicide that is well respected in the academic and treatment communities:

individuals who choose death by suicide have experienced "enough past pain and provocation"² that they can steel themselves against the fear and avoidance of pain most people would experience when thinking of ending their own lives.

Dr. Joiner's perception, which is supported by empirical research and anecdotal accounts, is that the desire for death has two significant constituents—*perceived burdensomeness* and *failed belongingness*. He recounted a story published in *The New Yorker*

"I'm going to walk to
the bridge. If one
person smiles at me
on the way, I will
not jump."³

in 2003 about suicides at the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. A psychiatrist referenced in the article had visited the home of a man who died when he jumped off the bridge. A note was found that said, "I'm going to walk to the bridge. If one person smiles at me on the way, I will not jump."³

As I drove back to Lansing after the conference, my mind kept returning to perceived burdensomeness and failed belongingness. Assuming these constituents are relevant, how do they manifest themselves for law students, attorneys, and judges who choose death by suicide?

Perceived burdensomeness

Is there something about living one's life as a practicing attorney that may contrib-

ute to feeling like a burden to others? And if so, what might that be? During the panel discussion, Yvette Hourigan, director of the Kentucky Lawyers Assistance Program, noted that attorneys are fighting against a peer on the other side of every matter, and she compared the positions attorneys are in to that of physicians. As she explained, "A neurosurgeon operating on someone's brain does not have another equally educated and skilled neurosurgeon working to make certain he will fail."

Do lawyers feel a burden to prevail, knowing they cannot always do so yet feeling the weight of expectation from their clients? Or are they burdened by something else?

Failed belongingness

Is there something about living one's life as a practicing attorney that may contribute to feeling like you don't belong? Consider Hourigan's observation from a somewhat different angle: lawyers are always in competition—with opposing counsel, with lawyers in their area of practice, with lawyers in their firm or place of employment, and with lawyers in their bar associations. It starts in law school with your grade point average and rank in class and continues into practice.

As someone who is also an attorney, where do you feel like you belong, regardless of your rank in your law school class, grade point average, indebtedness, employment history, professional accomplishments, or future professional plans? Lawyers value their identity as lawyers. It sets them apart, and at times, we can only relax with other lawyers.

Our identities as attorneys occasionally may isolate us from people in our personal lives who love and support us. They may have ideas about the law, their fair share in a conflict, or other random matters they

share with us. We sometimes find ourselves the targets of anger or frustration if we try to explain legal realities to those close to us.

This practice puts us in contact with others similarly situated who are in competition with us. It also puts some invisible differences in place when we try to discuss legal matters with people in our personal lives. Those two realities could result in lawyers having a persistent sense of failed belongingness and perceived burdensomeness.

Depression

Those who carry the burden of a depressive mood disorder react more strongly to life's stresses and difficulties. The depressed brain is at a disadvantage when coping with stress. It is more difficult to generate options and see other possibilities. We can guess that an attorney who struggles with depression would react more strongly to the aforementioned troubles.

We don't have the answers, but we can wonder together and ponder alone. Whatever it takes to address the tendency for attorneys to become more depressed and anxious than other highly educated professionals, it is worthy of our time.

Many thanks to Gail and John Urso for establishing Kevin's Song and hosting this conference. ■



Tish Vincent, MSW, JD, LMSW, ACSW, CAADC is a licensed clinical social worker with expertise in the treatment of substance use and mental health disorders. She is also a licensed attorney with experience in health law and alternative dispute resolution. Vincent is the program administrator for the State Bar of Michigan Lawyers and Judges Assistance Program.

ENDNOTES

1. *The Silent Epidemic: A Conference on Suicide*, The Inn at Saint Johns, Plymouth, Michigan (April 7, 2016), program p 4.
2. *Id.* at 12.
3. Joiner, *Why People Die by Suicide* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

Interest Rates for Money Judgments Under MCL 600.6013 (Revised July 1, 2016*)

I. [MCL 600.6013(8)] FOR ALL COMPLAINTS FILED ON OR AFTER JANUARY 1, 1987 UNLESS SECTION II, III, or IV APPLIES:

Interest on a money judgment recovered in a civil action is calculated at 6-month intervals from the date of filing the complaint at a rate of interest equal to 1% plus the average interest rate paid at auctions of 5-year United States treasury notes during the 6 months immediately preceding July 1 and January 1, as certified by the state treasurer, and compounded annually, according to this section. Interest under this subsection is calculated on the entire amount of the money judgment, including attorney fees and other costs. See interest rate chart below.

II. [MCL 600. 6013(7)] FOR COMPLAINTS FILED ON OR AFTER JULY 1, 2002 THAT ARE BASED ON A WRITTEN INSTRUMENT WITH A SPECIFIED INTEREST RATE:

Interest is calculated from the date of filing the complaint to the date of satisfaction of the judgment at the rate specified in the instrument if the rate was legal at the time the instrument was executed. If the rate in the written instrument is a variable rate, interest shall be fixed at the rate in effect under the instrument at the time the complaint is filed. The rate under this subsection shall not exceed 13% per year compounded annually.

III. [MCL 600. 6013(5 and 6)] FOR COMPLAINTS FILED ON OR AFTER JANUARY 1, 1987, BUT BEFORE JULY 1, 2002 THAT ARE BASED ON A WRITTEN INSTRUMENT:

Interest is calculated from the date of filing the complaint to the date of satisfaction of the judgment at the rate of 12% per year compounded annually, unless the instrument has a higher rate of interest. In that case, interest shall be calculated at the rate specified in the instrument if the rate was legal at the time the instrument was executed. The rate shall not exceed 13% per year compounded annually after the date judgment is entered.

Notwithstanding the prior paragraph, if the civil action has not resulted in a final, nonappealable judgment as of July 1, 2002, and if a judgment is or has been rendered on a written instrument that does not evidence indebtedness with a specified interest rate, interest is calculated as provided in Section I above.

IV. ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

If the complaint was filed before January 1, 1987, refer to MCL 600.6013(2)-(4).

Interest is not allowed on future damages from the date of filing the complaint to the date of entry of the judgment. [MCL 600.6013(1)]

The amount of allowable interest may be different in certain settlement and medical malpractice case scenarios. [MCL 600.6013(9-13)]

Effective Date	Average Certified by State Treasurer	Statutory 1%	Interest Rate	Effective Date	Average Certified by State Treasurer	Statutory 1%	Interest Rate
Jan. 1, 1987	6.66%	1%	7.66%	Jan. 1, 2002	4.14%	1%	5.14%
July 1, 1987	7.50%	1%	8.50%	July 1, 2002	4.36%	1%	5.36%
Jan. 1, 1988	8.39%	1%	9.39%	Jan. 1, 2003	3.189%	1%	4.189%
July 1, 1988	8.21%	1%	9.21%	July 1, 2003	2.603%	1%	3.603%
Jan. 1, 1989	9.005%	1%	10.005%	Jan. 1, 2004	3.295%	1%	4.295%
July 1, 1989	9.105%	1%	10.105%	July 1, 2004	3.357%	1%	4.357%
Jan. 1, 1990	8.015%	1%	9.015%	Jan. 1, 2005	3.529%	1%	4.529%
July 1, 1990	8.535%	1%	9.535%	July 1, 2005	3.845%	1%	4.845%
Jan. 1, 1991	8.26%	1%	9.26%	Jan. 1, 2006	4.221%	1%	5.221%
July 1, 1991	7.715%	1%	8.715%	July 1, 2006	4.815%	1%	5.815%
Jan. 1, 1992	7.002%	1%	8.002%	Jan. 1, 2007	4.701%	1%	5.701%
July 1, 1992	6.68%	1%	7.68%	July 1, 2007	4.741%	1%	5.741%
Jan. 1, 1993	5.797%	1%	6.797%	Jan. 1, 2008	4.033%	1%	5.033%
July 1, 1993	5.313%	1%	6.313%	July 1, 2008	3.063%	1%	4.063%
Jan. 1, 1994	5.025%	1%	6.025%	Jan. 1, 2009	2.695%	1%	3.695%
July 1, 1994	6.128%	1%	7.128%	July 1, 2009	2.101%	1%	3.101%
Jan. 1, 1995	7.38%	1%	8.38%	Jan. 1, 2010	2.480%	1%	3.480%
July 1, 1995	6.813%	1%	7.813%	July 1, 2010	2.339%	1%	3.339%
Jan. 1, 1996	5.953%	1%	6.953%	Jan. 1, 2011	1.553%	1%	2.553%
July 1, 1996	6.162%	1%	7.162%	July 1, 2011	2.007%	1%	3.007%
Jan. 1, 1997	6.340%	1%	7.340%	Jan. 1, 2012	1.083%	1%	2.083%
July 1, 1997	6.497%	1%	7.497%	July 1, 2012	0.871%	1%	1.871%
Jan. 1, 1998	5.920%	1%	6.920%	Jan. 1, 2013	0.687%	1%	1.687%
July 1, 1998	5.601%	1%	6.601%	July 1, 2013	0.944%	1%	1.944%
Jan. 1, 1999	4.8335%	1%	5.8335%	Jan. 1, 2014	1.452%	1%	2.452%
July 1, 1999	5.067%	1%	6.067%	July 1, 2014	1.622%	1%	2.622%
Jan. 1, 2000	5.7563%	1%	6.7563%	Jan. 1, 2015	1.678%	1%	2.678%
July 1, 2000	6.473%	1%	7.473%	July 1, 2015	1.468%	1%	2.468%
Jan. 1, 2001	5.965%	1%	6.965%	Jan. 1, 2016	1.571%	1%	2.571%
July 1, 2001	4.782%	1%	5.782%	July 1, 2016	1.337%	1%	2.337%

*For the most up-to-date information, visit <http://courts.michigan.gov/Administration/SCAO/Resources/Documents/other/interest.pdf>.