Medical doctors are at higher risk of suicide than any other profession.

By some estimates, 400 physicians die by suicide every year, the equivalent of losing an entire medical school with the potential to serve a million patients just disappears.

In reality, the number of physician suicides may be considerably higher since the profession historically has remained silent regarding the prevalence and cause of the problem, according to Pamela Wible, MD, a Eugene, OR, family physician who was named one of the 2015 Women Leaders in Medicine by the American Medical Student Association for her pioneering work in medical student and physician suicide prevention.

“Across the country, our doctors are jumping from hospital rooftops, overdosing in call rooms, found hanging in hospital chapels. It’s medicine’s dirty secret,” Dr. Wible said.

In a recent study, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health estimates that nearly 4 percent of all physician deaths result from suicide. Causes include stress, long hours, demanding patients, malpractice suits, medical school expenses and ease of access to medications. Male and female physicians are equally as likely to die by suicide but female doctors are almost three times as likely to kill themselves as women in other professions.

Dr. Wible feels the problem may be more systemic starting with bullying and hazing in medical school, pressure to perform and long hours during residencies and the stress involved in everyday practice. The system actually discourages medical students, residents and practicing physicians from seeking help when needed. Indeed, too many physicians suffering with mental illness are reluctant to seek psychiatric care for fear of harming their careers.

In addition to her family practice, Dr. Wible has counselled hundreds of suffering medical students and physicians. Her goal is to inspire medical students, physicians, their staffs and patients through non-violent communication and humane teaching methods; recognize and alleviate abuse of medical students and physicians in the workplace; and intervene effectively with depressed and/or suicidal medical students and physicians.
Dr. Wible recently published *Physician Suicide Letters—Answered*, a distillation of her correspondence and communications with suicidal physicians. She is featured in a documentary film about physician suicide, *Do No Harm*. (View movie trailer.) Physicians may also view her TEDMED talk, *Why Physicians Kill Themselves*. Physicians needing help may contact Dr. Wible at IdealMedicalCare.org.