

What Is Special about the ASSIP Approach and Why Do We Need to Reach Beyond?

Invited lecture · Konrad Michel

Prof. Konrad Michel, Prof. Emeritus at the University of Bern, is a world-renowned psychiatrist and psychotherapist. He co-developed a person-centered approach to the suicidal individual, based on the notion that suicide and suicide attempts are actions that can be understood through personal narratives-offering a meaningful alternative to the traditional medical model.

Abstract. With ASSIP (Attempted Suicide Short Intervention Program) we introduced a radically new way to establish a working alliance with suicidal patients. The approach is based on the notion that suicide is an action for which suicidal persons have their reasons, in contrast to the medical model which understands suicide as a consequence of a mental disorder. The latter does not help patients to understand their own, very personal suicidal development and to learn to deal with it. In a RCT (2016) with 120 patients seen after a suicide attempt we showed that with only three sessions the ASSIP approach is extremely effective in reducing the risk of reattempts. The radically person-centred stance is meaningful to patients and leads to a therapeutic alliance, allowing people to successfully apply the jointly developed personal safety strategies. However, from my experience of teaching ASSIP internationally, I have come to the conclusion that – although brief treatments for high-risk patients are important – they are not enough. If we want to reduce suicidal behaviour in this world, we need find ways to reach out to people at risk who do not seek help. For instance, this could include developing strategies to promote a person-oriented suicide health literacy in the general public.