

Robin Williams' Death Shows Ticking Time Bomb of Depression, Addiction

On Monday, legendary comic and Oscar-winning actor Robin Williams was found dead in his California home, the result of an apparent suicide. Friends and family said the 63-year-old comedian had been battling severe depression. News reports Tuesday said it appeared to have been a self-inflicted death by hanging.

Dr. Karl Benzio, a psychiatrist and founder and executive director of Lighthouse Network, an addiction and mental-health counseling helpline, said that Williams was a sensitive and gifted man who battled many inner demons.

"Robin Williams could make anyone laugh," Benzio said. "His laugh was deep and warm, but it's ironic how he could not warm his own heart deep enough to soothe the inner turmoil he battled most of his life. We are saddened by the loss of such talent and grieve with those close to him. We were all lucky to receive the gift of laughter that he handed out in large doses.

"There are many complex reasons for addiction and mental health that are extremely important to address. ... Suicide, taking into account under-reporting and passive suicides, is the second-leading cause of death after cardiovascular disease. Unfortunately, Mr. Williams' death isn't a rare situation and highlights how unprejudiced suicide is. It doesn't discriminate in any way and affects people of all ages, races and socio-economic status."

Williams was open about his struggle with drugs and alcohol throughout his life and entered a rehab program earlier this summer. Benzio said it is common for those who battle

addiction to also experience deep depression.

“Depression comes from the wounds and adversities that we have trouble processing and finding an answer to,” he said. “When compounded by self-medicating substance abuse, the ticking time bomb can go off at any time. No one is immune to the devastation caused by the tentacles of depression. Robin Williams’ tragic death is a grim reminder of how complex behavioral health issues are to understand, live with and treat. We need reform and awareness, and we need to bring God back into the healing process. Nothing else is powerful enough to bring lasting healing and transformation.”

Williams’ death is even more tragic because he saw no other way out of his darkness than to take his own life, Benzio added.

He explained that those who are concerned about a friend or loved one battling depression or addiction should reach out for help through a trusted mental-health resource or hospital.