

2 *Introducing
the
Coordinator's
Corner*

4 *Sneak
Preview
of National
Awareness Event*

5 *FDA
Urges
Awareness with
Antidepressant
Use*



Jerry Reed, SPAN USA executive director, joins Ramya Sundararaman, prevention support coordinator, Suicide Prevention Resource Center, Mary Drexler, vice president of casework and training, United Way of Connecticut/2-1-1 Infoline, and Greg Miller, SPAN New England president, for the launch of SPAN New England.

GRASSROOTS STRENGTHENED AS SPAN USA Affiliates Grow

The hallmark of SPAN USA is the energy and commitment of suicide prevention advocates working at the grassroots. An important strategy to grow the SPAN USA movement is the affiliation process. SPAN USA is working to coordinate this grassroots energy and solidify its affiliate network, important steps that also increase the likelihood of attracting national funding for its suicide prevention agenda.

SPAN USA affiliates are independent nonprofits advocating at the state and regional levels. Affiliates use the SPAN USA name, logo and information to strengthen suicide prevention awareness within their communities. Affiliates also receive 20 percent of each SPAN USA membership from

their state. "I'm committed to returning resources to affiliates because suicide prevention is really done at the grassroots levels," said Jerry Reed, SPAN USA executive director.

Affiliates reported that association with SPAN USA provides name recognition, credibility and an invitation to collaboration. John Hanks, SPAN Idaho president, explained that when his state's Adolescent Suicide Prevention Task Force wanted to broaden its scope, affiliation with SPAN USA was a natural fit. "SPAN USA was the group that best mirrored what we were doing," Hanks said. "SPAN USA had a great reputation for being a collaborative group with a broad agenda."

GO TO PAGE 6

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executive director's message

SPAN USA is pleased to welcome its newest affiliates, SPAN New England and SPAN Florida, to the network. The power to affect suicide prevention public policy comes from building public will, possessing the knowledge about what needs to be done and having a strategy to effect change.

Much of what SPAN USA has accomplished has been done at the grassroots level. Our community advocates are, and will always be, the fuel of SPAN USA. In our neighborhoods, communities and states from coast to coast, SPAN USA advocates make the difference by running groups, educating legislators, teaching classes or getting advocacy letters signed. Our affiliates increase our base, strengthen our voice and mobilize our communities around suicide prevention. This community involvement is essential if we are to achieve our goals.

I thank you all for what you have done and look forward to more affiliates forming in the months and years to come. I also wish to congratulate SPAN-California for a successful state suicide prevention planning conference held May 6-7, 2004 in Sacramento, California. You all did a fantastic job!

Jerry Reed

SPAN USA Executive Director



coordinator's corner

Ideas, strategies, and resources from SPAN USA program coordinator Lidia Bernik

When people learn about SPAN USA and want to get involved, their first question is always, "How can I help?" Similarly, when people sign up to become community organizers, the first thing they ask is, "What should I do?"

These questions are often difficult to answer. Everyone brings a different story and talents to raising awareness and advocating for suicide prevention. Some individuals I hear from have been in the field of suicide prevention for years while others have only just become involved.

However, there are a number of simple things we can all do to raise awareness, advocate and support SPAN USA. Here is a brief list of things you and anyone else who wants to help can do:

- Communicate with your legislators using the SPAN USA Legislative Action Center (LAC) (<http://capwiz.com/spanusa>).
- Use the Tell-A-Friend tool on the LAC and tell five of your friends to take action.
- Become a SPAN USA member. (See membership form on page 6.)
- Use your copy of *The Network News* to get five friends to become a member.
- Add an LAC web sticker to your organization's Web site. (See www.spancalifornia.org for an example).
- Sign up for SPAN USA's Action E-List, and receive alerts when your involvement can make a critical difference (<http://capwiz.com/spanusa/mlm>).
- Help raise funds for SPAN USA by creating your own Just Giving page (www.justgiving.com/spanusa).
- Print out five advocacy letters, and get five friends to sign them.

Many of us have grueling schedules with competing demands, which make adding one more task seem simply overwhelming. But that shouldn't stop you from being an active advocate. If you do a little, and get five friends to do a little, and they ask their friends to do a little, the result will be that we have done a lot.

So pick a few things on the list today, and start doing the little that turns into a lot. ■



resource **roundup**

NCAA suicide prevention resources available. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) offers several resources for those concerned about depressed or suicidal student athletes. One of those resources is an educational video featuring Jan Ulrich, a SPAN USA community organizer in Kentucky. Ulrich shares the story of her son Nathan Eisert, a college basketball player who died by suicide in June 2002. The video urges the coaches, train-

ers and players to both ask for and offer help when someone appears depressed or suicidal. Other resources include screening tools, educational programming and training opportunities for students, friends, families and college personnel. Visit www.ncaa.org/health-safety, and click on "Hot Topics: Depression in Athletes."

Evidence of parental link to suicidal ideation and attempts.

Using data from the National

Comorbidity Survey, researchers at Columbia University and Christchurch School of Medicine in New Zealand found that parental suicidal ideation was associated with a significantly increased likelihood of suicidal ideation and suicide attempt among offspring. The article by R.D. Goodwin, A.L. Beautrais and D.M. Fergusson appears in *Psychiatry Research*, April 30 2004, Vol. 126 (2) 159-165. ■

advocates in **action**

Greg Miller spearheaded the formation of SPAN New England and now serves as its president

How did you become connected with SPAN USA?

As the director of a suicide prevention crisis center, I attended the first forum on suicide prevention in Massachusetts and heard SPAN USA founders Jerry and Elsie Weyrauch speak. A group of us advocates from that forum went on to form the state's suicide prevention coalition. As the coalition worked on a series of activities – drafting a state plan for suicide prevention, educating state legislators, securing suicide prevention funding and holding annual conferences – I followed SPAN USA's work from afar. Dr. Lloyd Potter, currently director of the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, said to me, "We need SPAN USA in Massachusetts." It took me three years to respond to his challenge.

What are the benefits of being a regional affiliate?

A regional affiliate embodies the SPAN USA spirit of networking. The states in our region are at various stages of development. Being a regional affiliate allows us to learn from one another. I can bring what I have learned in Massachusetts to other states, while I can learn from states that may be further along. For example, Maine began its statewide prevention efforts long before people even thought about state or national efforts. In addition, New England is a diverse area rich with resources that can have an

impact on suicide prevention, such as universities, top-notch programs and experts in substance abuse and gun violence prevention. SPAN New England can make a difference by bringing these experts together with advocates at the community level, particularly attempt survivors and families.

What do you see in the future for SPAN New England and SPAN USA?

With state budget cuts, suicide prevention efforts in New England have run into rough times lately, and momentum has stalled. But, suicide prevention is a long-term effort. During these tough times, SPAN New England needs to sustain the momentum SPAN USA started in 1996. We will take our display and travel across New England this summer and hand out information and resources. We will reach out to faith communities, conduct trainings, educate legislators and increase media attention – everything we can to keep suicide prevention on the front burner.

SPAN USA is poised to really take off. The organization has reached the tipping point. Eager people want to educate themselves about suicide prevention. The message that suicide is preventable is getting out there. There is more depression screening by health care workers and in schools. This is not rocket science. Ordinary people can do something to help save a life. And there are lots of people that want to help. That's what SPAN is all about. ■



Register for the September National Awareness Event

Make your arrangements now for SPAN USA's National Awareness Event on Sept. 19-21, 2004, in Washington, D.C. Beginning with a memorial event at the Lincoln Memorial on Sunday and concluding with Capitol Hill visits on Tuesday, SPAN USA organizers will have many opportunities to hear new ideas and learn helpful strategies to bring back to their respective states. Scheduled events include workshops on media training, organizing your state or region, developing public messages for suicide prevention, understanding evidence-based practices and using effective advocacy tools.

For a registration form, visit www.spanusa.org. Make your reservations at the Capitol Hilton by calling (800) HILTONS or (202) 393-1000. Call by Aug. 20 to receive the SPAN USA room rate.

SPAN USA Board Welcomes Sharon Smith

The SPAN USA Board of Directors welcomes Sharon Smith. Mrs. Smith and her husband Sen. Gordon Smith lost their son to suicide in September 2003. She joins other board members as they work to fulfill SPAN USA's mission – preventing suicide through personal and community action grounded in best practices and collaboration.

The board also expresses appreciation to Linda Flatt (SPAN Nevada), who recently left the board but will remain closely tied to SPAN USA, serving on the National Advisory Council and as chair of the Field Development Committee. ■

donations make a difference

SPAN USA awareness and advocacy activities are supported through individual and corporate donations large and small. SPAN USA thanks the following donors for their gracious support and acknowledges the memories of their friends and loved ones.

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washingtonwatch

BILL PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES INTRODUCED

On March 12, 2004, Sen. Reed (D-RI), along with original co-sponsors Sens. DeWine (R-Ohio), Clinton (D-NY) and Smith (R-OR), introduced the College Campus Care and Counseling Act (S. 2215) to provide funds for campus mental and behavioral health service centers. The legislation would provide competitive three-year grants to higher education institutions to enhance mental and behavioral health services for students. Grants could be used for prevention, screening, early intervention, assessment, treatment, management and education of students' mental and behavioral health problems and family education. A similar House bill (H.R. 3593), introduced in November 2003 by Reps. Davis (D-IL) and Osborne (R-NE), has gained 25 co-sponsors.

Recommended Action: Contact your senators and representatives and

request their co-sponsorship and support of S. 2215 and H.R. 3593. Communicate with your legislators using the SPAN USA Legislative Action Center at <http://capwiz.com/spanusa>.

FAMILY OPPORTUNITY ACT MOVES FORWARD

The Senate passed the Family Opportunity Act, also known as the Dylan Lee James Act (S. 622) on May 6, 2004. If enacted, families of disabled children would be able to purchase Medicaid coverage for their children. This action would help families faced with the dilemma of relinquishing custody of their children with serious emotional disturbance in order to access care. The House version (H.R. 1811) is still in committee and has 111 cosponsors.

Recommended Action: Ask your Representative to support at-risk children and families by co-sponsoring H.R. 1811 and calling for the passage of

the Dylan Lee James Act. See <http://capwiz.com/spanusa>.

FDA URGES AWARENESS OF SUICIDE SIGNS IN THOSE TAKING ANTIDEPRESSANTS

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently asked pharmaceutical manufacturers to add labels warning that some antidepressants may pose a risk for suicidal behavior. While the analysis of clinical trial data is still underway, the federal agency took the step of urging physicians and families to be aware of suicidal behavior in people who begin antidepressant therapy or change dosages. The FDA's actions followed recent advisory committee meetings during which parents testified about the suicidal attempts of their children shortly after starting on antidepressants. To read the FDA's public health advisory and other information, visit www.fda.gov/cder/drug/antidepressants.

Affiliates

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Greg Miller, SPAN New England president, echoed the importance of SPAN USA's emphasis upon collaboration. "No one single individual, agency or organization can do this [suicide prevention] alone. Every time I worked with SPAN USA, it was very clear that the organization's aim was to unite people. The real strength of SPAN USA is its ability to get organizations to work together and truly network."

READY-MADE STRUCTURE

Connection to a national organization also provides a ready-made structure and identity for local advocates, particularly given SPAN USA's long-standing presence in the suicide prevention field. "Rather than reinvent the wheel, [Idaho] wanted to link arms with a national suicide prevention group," Hanks said. In addition, the national organization provides greater educational opportunities and resources. Brenda Molinaro, Treasure Coast community organizer for SPAN Florida, said she receives tremendous benefits from national conferences and the SPAN USA network. "There is so much to learn at SPAN USA events and other national conferences. In the beginning, I collected suicide prevention materials and brought them home to figure out which would be most suitable for my area."

Although advocates often speak of the challenges of running an affiliate in addition to their holding down a full-time job

and other responsibilities, they believe the benefits outweigh the demands. "Doing this work can help with the grieving process," Molinaro said. "Survivors need to know they can put their pain to work. The energy to run an organization ... comes from the will to make a difference. You do it for your loved one. Or, you see you can save lives. When you see the results, you feed on that energy, and it makes it all worthwhile."

Underscoring the importance of the grassroots, New England's Miller said,

"Whatever we do around suicide prevention will not happen in Washington, D.C., state capitols or in state departments of public health. The real successes will happen in local communities at the grassroots level across the country and involve ordinary people in all walks of life." ■

To learn more about how to fuel this grassroots energy and become a SPAN USA affiliate, contact Jerry Reed, SPAN USA executive director, at (202) 449-3600 or jreed@spanusa.org.

Membership Opportunity

Send a contribution today or become a SPAN USA Member to help America's most effective grassroots suicide prevention organization continue its important work. For more information about SPAN USA membership, see www.spanusa.org/join.html. Mail to: SPAN USA, 1025 Vermont Ave. NW, Suite 1200, Washington, DC 20005

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