



SUICIDE PREVENTION ACTION NETWORK USA



PARADE

For Immediate Release

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MENTAL HEALTH NOT GIVEN EQUAL IMPORTANCE, AMERICANS SAY *Most Consider Mental Health as Important as Physical Health*

WASHINGTON, Sept. 28, 2006—While nearly nine out of 10 (89%) Americans say mental health is as important as physical health, only one-fourth (24%) believe physical and mental health are treated with equal importance in the U.S. health care system. Nearly all (92%) say that mental health services such as treatment for depression and suicide prevention should be part of any basic health care plan: 65% strongly agree and 27% say they somewhat agree.

These are among the findings of a national poll released today by the Suicide Prevention Action Network (SPAN USA), Research!America and *PARADE* magazine. Selected results from the poll are reported in this Sunday's issue of *PARADE*. October 5 is National Depression Screening Day, and October 10 is World Mental Health Day.

“By shedding light on mental health conditions such as depression, we can help remove the stigma that prevents too many people from seeking treatment,” said Lee Kravitz, editor-in-chief of *PARADE*.

The study also reveals important new findings about Americans' attitudes toward suicide prevention. For the first time, Americans were asked if they believe that appropriate intervention and services can help prevent suicide, and if the government should invest in suicide prevention. The poll finds that a vast majority of Americans (86%) think it is important for the U.S. to invest in suicide prevention. More than three-quarters (78%) believe that suicides could be prevented with research, interventions and services.

“Suicide is a preventable public health problem, as more than 90 percent of those who die by suicide suffer from depression or other mental or substance abuse disorders,” said Jerry Reed, executive director of SPAN USA, a sponsoring partner of the recent PARADE/Research!America Health Poll. “Although 92 percent of Americans believe that mental health services should be part of any basic health care plan, we know that far too often people do not get the help they need because they lack health insurance coverage for treatment of depression and other mental health conditions.”

More than 31,000 people die by suicide each year in the United States and about 650,000 make an attempt. Suicide deaths consistently outnumber homicide deaths by a margin of three to two.

Mental Health Not Given Equal Importance/2

Mental health professionals and researchers have identified a number of suicide warning signs. For example, a person may be suicidal if he or she talks about committing suicide, has trouble eating or sleeping, experiences drastic changes in behavior, withdraws from friends or social activities, loses interest in work or school, gives away prized possessions, has attempted suicide in the past, has had recent severe losses, is preoccupied with death and dying, loses interest in their personal appearance, or increases the use of alcohol or drugs. If you or someone you know is in crisis, call 911 or 800-273-TALK. More information about suicide prevention can be found at www.spanusa.org.

“Research is the key to better understand, treat and prevent mental illness,” said Mary Woolley, president of Research!America. “On this issue, the public does not see our health care system as keeping up with their expectations, and a stronger investment in mental health research will be critical to help to put mental health on a more equal footing with physical health conditions.”

Research!America and SPAN USA conducted a similar poll in 2004. A comparison of the results shows that the same proportion of Americans believe that physical and mental health are equally important, and a similar number agree that mental health, including treatment for depression and suicide prevention, should be part of any basic health care plan. However, an increasing number of people today think that physical health is treated as more important than mental health in our current health care system.

For more data on the poll, please visit www.researchamerica.org.

Charlton Research Company conducted the telephone survey Feb. 17-22, 2006, among 1,000 adults nationwide. The sample was proportionate to the country’s demographics, including age, geography, gender and ethnicity. The survey has a sampling error of ± 3.1 percentage points.

About SPAN USA

The Suicide Prevention Action Network is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to preventing suicide through public education and awareness, community action and federal, state and local grassroots advocacy. SPAN USA is the nation's only suicide prevention organization dedicated to leveraging grassroots support among suicide survivors and others to advance public policies that help prevent suicide. Visit www.spanusa.org.

About Research!America

Research!America is the nation’s largest not-for-profit public education and advocacy alliance working to make research to improve health a higher national priority. Research!America has been gauging Americans’ attitudes toward medical and health research for more than a decade. A report on the poll findings is available at www.researchamerica.org.

About PARADE

Each Sunday, *PARADE*, the largest circulation magazine in the world, has a conversation with America—educating, entertaining and empowering its 79 million readers. For more than 60 years, *PARADE*’s columns, in-depth articles and inspiring stories have helped people to affect change in their lives, their communities and the world. *PARADE* is distributed in all 50 states and the District of Columbia through more than 350 newspapers.