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Suicide Prevention Action Network Testifies at FDA Hearing

***More Research Needed on Link between
Suicide and Antidepressants in Children;***

Patient and Family Education Key to Prevention

Washington, D.C. (September 13, 2004) - The Suicide Prevention Action Network USA (SPAN USA) testified today before two Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advisory committees to underscore the need for continued and improved research into the efficacy of antidepressants for treating depression and suicidal behavior among children and adolescents.

The joint meeting of the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER) Psychopharmacologic Drugs Advisory Committee and the FDA Pediatric Advisory Committee are convening September 13-14, 2004, to review FDA analysis of data and reports compiled by a team of pediatric suicide experts assembled by Columbia University. During the meeting, the committees will consider what further regulatory action may be needed with regard to the clinical use of antidepressants in pediatric patients. The panel of experts was formed following a February 2, 2004, meeting, in which pharmaceutical sponsors of antidepressants presented adverse event reports of the drugs.

Jerry Reed, M.S.W., executive director of SPAN USA, advised that the clinical trials have been too short in duration; have screened out those at highest risk; and that not all of the reports on the trials have been published. Reed recommended that all those involved with the treatment of children and adolescents with depression be forewarned about the potential risks and be informed as to what signs and symptoms are indicative of a potentially serious problem.

“We need to hear all of the findings - that’s just responsible management of the issue,” said Reed. “We owe parents with children suffering from mental illness nothing less. If we are to continue screening and identifying young people, it is imperative that we have safe and effective treatments to provide those identified at risk. The limited evidence available and the shortcomings of the research conducted thus far underscore the need for continued and improved research.”

“Patient education is a proactive action that can be taken and documented now,” Reed added. “It is the least we can do while the requisite research is pursued and science produces safe and effective treatments.”

Youth suicide prevention has recently received widespread attention with the passage of the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act, which authorizes \$82 million in grant money over a three-year period to states, Indian tribes and colleges and universities for the development of youth suicide prevention and intervention programs. The bill calls for early screening programs to identify mental illness in children and to provide treatment referrals; training for community child-care professionals; and the authorization of a Suicide Prevention Resource Center, which would provide training and technical assistance to states and other eligible entities.

“SPAN USA is pleased that public policy leaders recognize the importance of suicide prevention as a public health issue,” continued Reed. “The Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act, coupled with today’s hearings, illustrates how advocacy can spur action to prevent youth suicide. SPAN USA is going to continue to focus on youth suicide during its National Awareness Event next week.”

SPAN USA National Awareness Event

Suicide prevention advocates will convene in Washington, D.C., September 19-21 for SPAN USA’s National Awareness Event. Speakers will include distinguished medical professionals including Surgeon General Richard Carmona; Lloyd Potter, M.P.H., Ph.D., director of the Suicide Prevention Resource Center; and Maddy Gould, Ph.D., M.P.H. of Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons; and survivors of loved ones lost to suicide, including Carla Fine, author of No Time to Say Goodbye: Surviving the Suicide of a Loved One, survivor of her husband’s suicide, and Parker Bruce, a 13-year-old survivor of his father, aunt and grandfather’s suicides. The event will also include a presentation of awards to suicide prevention champions Dr. Mark Rosenberg, Sen. Gordon Smith (R-OR), Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT) and Eli Lilly and a display of 30 *Lifekeeper Faces of Suicide Memorial Quilts* at the Lincoln Memorial.

For a copy of SPAN USA’s testimony or to schedule an interview with Jerry Reed, please contact Laura Brinker at 202-715-1540 or laura.brinker@dittus.com.

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SPAN USA is the nation's only suicide prevention organization dedicated to leveraging grassroots support among suicide survivors (those who have lost a loved one to suicide) and others to advance public policies that help prevent suicide. Since its founding eight years ago, SPAN USA has led the drive to make suicide a public health priority by building political will and calling for the development and implementation of a national strategy for suicide prevention. Using its extensive grassroots network of survivors and advocates, SPAN USA has actively promoted the cause on Capitol Hill and in state legislatures.