

SPAN REPORT

Information for Legislators, Educators and other Policymakers from California's **Suicide Prevention** Advocacy Network

New Study Links Family History to Suicide Risk

A Danish research team has conclusively linked suicide risk with family history of suicide and family history of psychiatric illness.

They found you are two and a half times more likely to attempt suicide if someone in your family has taken their own life. If you have a family history of mental illness, your suicide risk increases about 50 percent.

The risk of suicide is even greater for individuals whose family history includes both factors.

The report tracked 4,262 people, between the ages of 9 and 45, who had completed suicide and compared them to more than 80,000 control subjects. Researchers evaluated suicide history of parents and siblings, history of psychiatric illness among parents and siblings and other data.

The exact cause for the increased risk of suicide is unknown. However, Dr. Ping Qin, lead author and researcher at Aarhus University in Denmark, suggested that the link may be genetic.

This study could prove useful in suicide prevention programs targeting adolescents and young adults.

SPAN-California wishes to thank Rosalinde Mervel of Redondo Beach for her generous gift in memory of her son Jason. Her contribution has enabled us to take this publication from a dream to a reality.

Statewide Suicide Prevention Strategy Conference To Be Planned

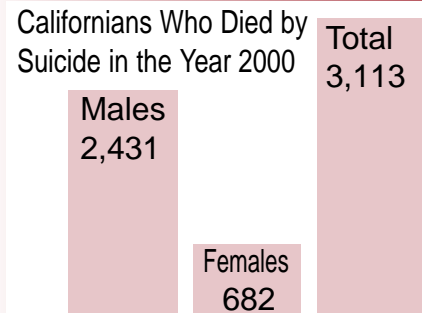
An open invitation to participate or sponsor

By Mark Chaffee

SPAN-California has begun planning a working conference to begin the process of developing a state-wide Strategy for Suicide Prevention (SSP). The primary purpose of the conference will be to develop recommendations for the SSP and will include input from researchers, medical professionals, caregivers, gatekeeper, clergy, educators, government officials, elected officials, private and public suicide prevention organizations and other interested individuals.

The conference will also be a showcase for presentations on recent suicide prevention research and community best practices.

(continued page 4)



Center for Health Statistics - Death Records

Los Angeles DMH Training Therapists on Suicide Prevention

Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health is in the process of training hundreds of mental health professionals in suicide intervention. SPAN-California board member Kathleen Snyder helped roll out the program by training key trainers and conducting the initial workshops for the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) program, developed by Living Works.

"Most therapists don't receive suicide intervention training in their formal educations," Kathleen stated. "After attending this workshop they come away fully equipped to listen when encountering

someone suicidal. The course teaches them how to get out of the therapeutic or diagnostic role and be more human."

GSPAN REPORT

The Road to SPAN-California

By Sam Bloom

Welcome to the first issue of the *SPANReport*, published by

SPAN-California. SPAN-California was established in 1999 by a group of Californians who participated in the first national suicide prevention conference held in October 1998 in Reno, Nevada. Since then, SPAN-California has become "The Voice for Suicide Prevention" in our State.

On average, over 3,000 Californians die by suicide each year. This can be reduced--it must be reduced. Former Surgeon General David Satcher, M.D., has stated that many suicides are preventable. At the state level, there are no active programs to accomplish this. There are a few county and local programs starting up. Much more needs to be done.

California is ready to develop its own plan to reduce suicide. The *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention* is a tool for states to use to do just that. SPAN-California strives to be a catalyst in this effort. But, it requires active participation and support of all government and private entities that can possibly contribute to a positive outcome. Please join with SPAN in this most important endeavor. Together we can save lives.

Please contact us with your comments or suggestions.

News from Around the State



G Fresno County Implements Strategy for Community Suicide Prevention

Building what could be a model for the rest of the state, Fresno County has created an effective, widespread suicide prevention strategy developed by a government/community Task Force on Suicide Prevention. Serving on the Task Force is SPAN-California board member Leann Gouveia, MPA, who is also the Executive Director of Fresno Survivors of Suicide Loss, Inc.

Fresno SOSL received a grant from the California Endowment to create the task force and held a forum to develop its county-wide suicide prevention strategy. They will implement the comprehensive plan, which includes training emergency responders, convalescent hospital employees and school administrators and staff.

There are programs that focus on outreach to youth and seniors, offering peer-to-peer counseling for both groups, as these age groups have above average numbers of suicides.

G New Hotline for Patient Referral 1-877-778-CARL (2275)

Ardent Health Services and the Jason Foundation have announced the creation of the Community Assistance Resource Line (CARL), a toll-free, 7-day/24-hour referral service for people who need to find mental health/suicide prevention resources in their area. The line is not intended to be a crisis line, but rather a referral line, to help people get treatment throughout California.

The hotline referral number is 1-877-778-CARL (2275) and is staffed by professionals at Ardent behavioral health hospitals in Alhambra and Sacramento. When calling the number, you are automatically routed to the closest facility to give you referrals in your community.

Fact: Firearms are used in 2 out of 3 youth suicides.

(National Center for Health Statistics)

G LA Schools Holds Symposium for Educators

Los Angeles County Department of Education held a one-day symposium entitled "Stayin' Alive: Preventing Suicide Among Children & Adolescents," presented by Dr. Michael Pines.

The course presented the Surgeon General's National Strategy for Suicide Prevention as a blueprint for action to prevent child and adolescent suicides for schools and other agencies throughout LA County.

Issues covered included: "When there has been a suicide," "Targeted children and adolescents," "Intervention and Postvention," and "Surviving Suicide." Speakers included SPAN-California Past President Sam Bloom, who spoke about the suicide prevention movement, both nationally and in the State of California.

Dr. Stephen E. Brock of the Suicide Prevention Institute also spoke and presented a suicide prevention policy for school districts.

G Filmmaker Premieres Provocative New Suicide Prevention Short Film

Award-winning Writer/Director James Edwin Barrett has unveiled DIFFERENT PLACES, a short High-Definition docu-drama that aims to open discussion about suicide among survivors and non-survivors alike.

Barrett, who also serves as SPAN-California Vice President, wrote the screenplay to "explore the point-of-view of surviving suicide and how such a loss affects the lives of those left behind." Each of the film's three segments realistically portrays individuals coping with their devastating loss, some better able to cope than others.

The characters have experiences ranging from denial of the loved one's suicide, to one's own suicidal feelings, to facing difficult questions about suicide in a social setting.

Viewers, survivors and non-survivors alike, can all relate to these emotions to some degree. Barrett draws from his own experience as a survivor of his mother's suicide when he was 12 years old. The film promises to stimulate much discussion. For more information email: mijbarrett@aol.com

California Legislative Update

Legislators Declare September 2002 Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

Sacramento - State Senators have passed a resolution recognizing the scope and depth of the problem of suicide in California and proclaimed September 2002 as Suicide Prevention Awareness Month.

Among the long list of declarations, the proclamation states that nine persons die of suicide in California every day, or over 3,200 persons per year. It also points out that in at least two counties in California, suicide is now the leading cause of unnatural deaths. In addition to bringing awareness to suicide prevention during September, the Senate resolved that suicide is a major public health problem that can be reduced with effective actions, and that it is a state priority.

Senator Deborah Ortiz, a long-time champion of the suicide prevention cause, stated that California legislators "wanted to increase awareness and move us toward comprehensive suicide prevention plans."

Fact: Risk of suicide is nearly five times greater in homes with guns.
(New England Journal of Medicine)

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National News

• Early in 2002, President Bush signed into law a \$9 million budget to establish and run a National Suicide Prevention Resource Center. The actual amount for the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is \$3 million per year for three years.

The appropriations language states: "The Resource Center will provide training and field support and serve as a clearing house for all pertinent best practices information regarding suicide prevention. The Center should promote evaluation of suicide prevention programs to ensure that effective techniques, strategies and recommended best practices are made available to users."

• Institute of Medicine has released a report: *Reducing Suicide: A National Imperative*. The report recommends a national network of suicide research population laboratories, improved national monitoring of suicides, screening tools for physicians, and more funding for the development and testing of prevention programs. Go to www.iom.edu for more details.

• The SPAN-USA 2002 meeting, an exceptional event, was a combination of its "Seventh Annual Congressional Suicide Prevention Awareness Event" and its "Second Annual State Planners Meeting."

Four members of SPAN-California attended and three presented at panel discussions during the State Planners Meeting. This component of the conference has grown in importance to where significant officials of five agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services also spoke.

Over 150 attendees were strongly encouraged to develop their state strategies. Discovering that 18 states have state plans and most others are developing them, points to the fact that California is behind in its planning. With over 3,000 suicides in our state and an estimated 75,000 attempts, this is a critical public health problem.

The *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention: Goals and Objectives for Action*, published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is an outstanding resource to get us started in facing this challenge.

Contributed by Lois A. Bloom

State Strategy for Suicide Prevention

(continued from page 1)

This will be the first time that all stakeholders in suicide prevention will join together in one event for the purpose of defining a state SSP.

SPAN-California is currently seeking interested individuals and organizations that are willing to participate in creating this event or who are interested in sponsorship opportunities. Please contact SPAN-California President Mark Chaffee at (760) 753-4565 or markch@adelphia.net to learn how you can be a part of this exciting event.

G SPAN REPORT

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SPAN-California
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This newsletter is presented in loving memory of Jason Mervel

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