LOCAL FAITH COMMUNITIES COMMITTED TO “SILING THE SILENT EPIDEMIC”

Over 100 people attended “Silencing the Silent Epidemic: the Suicide Prevention and the African American Faith Communities Conference”, held March 15 at the Lentz Public Health Building in Nashville, and featuring several well-known advocates and experts in the mental health field. The conference was a project of TSPN’s Mid-Cumberland Region, with several TSPN allies and local churches assisting in planning the conference.

Major presenters included Donna Holland Barnes, Ph.D, President of the National Organization for People of Color Against Suicide; Commissioner Virginia Trotter Betts, MSN, JD, RN, FAAN, of the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, as well as Bishop William T. Young, PhD and Pastor Dianne Young, of the Healing Center in Memphis (organizers of the national Suicide and the Black Church conferences). Conference co-chairs were Gwen Hamer, Director of Clinical Leadership for the Tennessee Department of Mental Health & Developmental Disabilities, and Angie Thompson, Director of Behavioral Health Services for the Metro Nashville Public Health Department.

The conference featured a panel discussion on the human cost of suicide, led by Bishop and Pastor Young. Following lunch and a performance by the Greater Grace Temple Church Choir, participants attended breakout sessions on youth suicide prevention, stress management for adolescents, depression within the African-American community, co-occurring disorders within African-Americans, and common suicide warning signs. The event closed with small group sessions and an evaluation of next steps.

Event sponsors included Amerigroup, Centerstone, Lewis & Wright Funeral Directors, Henry Louis Smith Funeral Directors, Mental Health Association of Middle Tennessee, Mental Health Cooperative, Metro Nashville Public Health Department, New Hope Baptist Church, New Life thru Christ Ministries, New Generation Funeral Home, Rolling Hills Hospital, St. James Missionary Baptist Church, Stork Industries, Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth, Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, Watson Grove Missionary Baptist Church, and Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital.

All conference participants are invited to a series of meetings on developing position statements on suicide prevention for faith communities. The first meeting will take place on Wednesday, April 14, from 10 AM-12 PM at the Lentz building, located at 311 23rd Avenue North in Nashville. Interested parties should contact TSPN Executive Assistant Vladimir Enlow, MTS, at vladimir@tspn.org regarding your interest in attending this meeting. Further information about the meeting itself is available from Hamer at gwen.hamer@tn.gov or (615) 532-6510 or from Thompson at angie.thompson@nashville.gov or (615) 340-2185.
BAZELON CENTER EXPLAINS IMPACT OF HEALTH CARE LEGISLATION

The website of the Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law hosts several documents outlining mental health elements in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (H.R. 3590) signed into law last month.

The Bazelon Center is the country’s leading legal advocate for people with mental illness and disabilities and is responsible for several court rulings on the rights and treatment of the mentally ill. The foundation is named for the Chief Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit for much of the 1960s and 1970s. Bazelon’s opinions in several appellate court rulings first established the legal and human rights of mental patients in the United States.

The bill, signed into law by President Obama on March 23, includes several items that will improve the amount and level of care available to mental health consumers. The higher-profile aspects of the law—guaranteed issue and renewal, abolition of pre-existing conditions as grounds for denial of coverage, premium equity regardless of health condition, non-discrimination due to mental disability—will have obvious ramifications for people with mental health conditions. The legislation also expands upon mental health parity laws established by the Paul Wellstone and Pete Domenici Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008, the provisions of which went into effect on January 1 of this year.

The full text of the legislation is available at the Bazelon Center’s website, along with a summary of component reforms, both the ones that take effect immediately and those that go into effect in 2014. The site also features of how the bill affects access to mental health services, key documents in the development of the bill, and issue briefs on the incorporation of mental health care into the legislation.

Interactive pages hosted by the New York Times and Washington Post will help users understand how the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act affects them specifically. Roll call breakdowns of the March 21 House vote on the bill and the related Reconciliation Act (H.R. 4872) are also linked; both are courtesy of the Office of the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives.

The URL for this page on the Bazelon Center’s website is www.bazelon.org/issues/healthreform/index.htm. We encourage you to explore the Bazelon Center’s resources and history in full at www.bazelon.org.

PARENTS OF SUICIDE PROFILED IN CNN REPORT

Parents of Suicide (POS) was profiled in a recent CNN article on parental suicide grief. The article contained information on the forum and other support groups, in addition to CNN iReports from survivors. The piece, appearing on CNN’s website on March 4, was occasioned by the death of Michael Blosil, the teenage son of entertainer Marie Osmond.

POS (www.posffos.com) was founded by Karyl Chastain Beal, chair of TSPN’s South Central Region, and a network of other parents dealing with the loss of their children. Two POS members, Diane Kassellhut and Patricia Pedigo-Dunn, were interviewed for the story. Pedigo-Dunn, whose son Allen died October 13, 2009, submitted an iReport discussing Allen’s struggle with generalized anxiety disorder and alcohol abuse. In the article itself, Pedigo-Dunn explains the power of support groups in the healing process: “It is such an immediate bond when you meet another person whose child took their life.”

Kassellhut, who also submitted an iReport, expressed how the group helped her understand her feelings after losing her son Chris on September 13 of last year. “Things like calling our child’s cell phone, and hoping [they will] pick up, or sending Facebook messages and expecting an answer, even though we know, of course, we’re not going to get one... Someone else will say, “Yes, I’ve felt exactly the same thing.”

Other parents interviewed discussed the problem of survivor guilt and the stigma that sometimes leads parents to claim that their children’s deaths were something other than suicide. The parents also commented on the need for privacy during the grieving process and the publicity surrounding Blosil’s death.

The article includes a list of suicide warning signs courtesy of Health.com and links to the Suicide Grief Support Forum (www.suicidegrief.com), an outreach project of POS and the Families and Friends of Suicide (FFOS) group; Survivors of Suicide (www.survivorssofsuicide.com), a support group not affiliated with POS; and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) (www.afsp.org).

ETSU PEAKS PROGRAM TO TARGET CAMPUS, RURAL AREAS

A newly funded suicide prevention program at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) may not only help prevent suicide on the campus itself, but throughout the entire Appalachian region of Tennessee.

The ETSU PEAKS (Prevention through Education, Awareness and Knowledge of Suicide) program has been approved for funding by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) through its Campus Suicide Prevention Grants program. The three-year initiative, funded at $593,000 by SAMHSA and matched by ETSU, will primarily support suicide prevention efforts on campus but will also combat suicide in rural areas that are not often reached by or generally resistant to mental health campaigns.

“I feel like we have some unique things going on in a rural area that should be addressed,” Dr. Jameson Hirsch, assistant professor of psychology in at ETSU’s College of Arts and Sciences and primary investigator for the program, explains in a February 24 Kingsport Times-News article. “People are strong in their beliefs, their work ethics, their values and these things impact stigma... We want to work with some of the ideas that you have to be tough, independent and a rugged individualist because we’re from the South, from Appalachia, which prevents people from seeking help... We are dealing with a proud and unique set of students here and I think sometimes those things get in the way of trying to help the student. We’re trying to overcome those barriers.”

The program unites existing mental health and counseling services within ETSU departments, such as the housing office, campus security, the counseling center, Student Affairs, and the college’s departments of Psychology and Family Medicine.

Hirsch and other program staff will coordinate focus groups to determine the mental health needs of the campus community and to develop and implement training programs, workshops, and social marketing materials. Students, faculty, and administrators will be involved in the project as consultants, speakers, instructors, and “gatekeepers”—people who can spot troubled students and connect them with appropriate resources.

While there has not been a suicide on the ETSU campus in several years, the college has reported record enrollment numbers this school year. The last semester saw a 30 percent increase in student visits to the ETSU Counseling Center, and approximately 10 students were eventually hospitalized for mental health concerns.

WESTERN MENTAL HEALTH INSTITUTE OPENS IN BOLIVAR

The following press release was published on the TDH website. We appreciate Roger P. Pursley, CEO of Western Mental Health Institute, for alerting us to this development.

NASHVILLE – Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Commissioner (TDHDD) Virginia Trotter Betts hosted the grand opening of the new Western Mental Health Institute today.

The new facility includes a state-of-the-art “treatment mall” where patients will spend the majority of the day in a classroom atmosphere receiving services including counseling, medication management, case management, and other psychiatric inpatient services. The facility will also house a telemedicine pilot program in collaboration with Carey Counseling Center in Union City in an effort to reduce unnecessary transportation to the institute for mental health assessments.

“We are extremely excited about this new facility that will improve acute mental health services, as well as overall health care in Bolivar and throughout West Tennessee,” stated TDHDD Commissioner Virginia Trotter Betts. “This facility embodies our department’s mission to provide quality care in the least restrictive environment. Access to telemedicine services for mental health assessments will drastically cut down on transportation costs for communities in northwest Tennessee.”

Patients will move into the new 152-bed facility, located at 11100 Old Highway 64 in Bolivar by the end of March. The construction team broke ground in June of 2008 and completed construction under budget and ahead of schedule. The facility has received certification for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) through the Green Building Rating System developed by the U.S. Green Building Council. LEED certification is designed to promote design and construction practices that increase efficiency while reducing the negative environmental impacts of buildings and improving occupant health and well-being.

WMHI first opened in 1889 to serve the mentally ill in rural West Tennessee.
CORNELL UNIVERSITY ACTS IN THE WAKE OF RECENT SUICIDES

A recent rash of suicides at Cornell University has put officials at this Ivy League school redoubling their mental health and suicide prevention efforts.

Six confirmed or suspected suicides have occurred on campus this academic year—three within one month at the school and two within the same week. The most recent deaths occurred along the bridges that connect the campus to the rest of Ithaca, New York, all of which overlook deep gorges. While the school’s suicide rate is apparently consistent with that of other college campuses, and the current outbreak represents the first suicides on campus in five years, Cornell’s reputation for high academic stress and the involvement of the gorges in prior deaths has led to Cornell’s labeling as a “suicide school”, according to a March 16 Associated Press report.

“Cornell and the folks up at Cornell have set the gold standard. It is light years ahead of many other campuses,” said Morton Silverman, professor of psychiatry at the University of Chicago and former director of the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC), in a March 18 National Public Radio interview. “I do think that Cornell has done as much as they possibly can do, but sadly, it’s very difficult to ensure the safety of everyone all the time.”

To combat the recent trends, Cornell has posted lookouts on all campus bridges and conducted a series of dormitory wellness checks. The college is also instituting mandatory depression screenings for all visitors to the campus health clinic. Finally, the administration is considering taller fences along the gorge bridges.

“What we're trying to do is connect the dots before it becomes a crisis,” explains Dr. Tim Marchell, Director of Mental Health Initiatives at Cornell in the NPR segment. “Oftentimes, these subtle signs appear. And if we can get information from multiple sources and compare notes, we can begin to formulate a better picture of how someone is doing and come up with a plan to help them.”

SPRC RELEASES GUIDE FOR SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITIES

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) has published a report on opportunities for suicide prevention in senior living communities. The document sets forth recommended guidelines for at-risk residents, along with protocols for crisis response. The guide incorporates responses from focus groups of older adults.

"It Takes a Community" is the product of a summit held in 2008 on suicide prevention and mental wellness for adults over age 65. This age group has the highest suicide rate of all other age groups (14.7 per 100,000 compared to 11 per 100,000 for the U.S. general population). Rising suicide rates among middle-aged adults were implicated in the recent rise in overall suicide rates, and the aging baby boom generation threatens to magnify this trend.

The report features a powerful depiction of the human cost of suicide using survivor testimony, and an illustration of the unique risk and protective factors involved in older adult suicide. It recommends specific strategies to promote effective coping with life changes, social support, and engagement in the larger community—iii major protective factors.

Approaches for high-risk older adults, such as those with depression, physical disabilities, and substance abuse issues are covered in detail. These older adults need encouragement to pursue help-seeking behaviors, such as therapy or substance abuse services. Meanwhile, caretakers must learn how to identify residents who need these services, and to address medical conditions and impairment that compromises quality of life and may eventually trigger a suicide attempt.

Finally, guidelines for responding to suicide crises and organizing postvention efforts within older adult communities are also addressed.

The report closes with an expanded section on perspectives of mental health and aging, and the factors which enhance and detract from mental health and quality of life for older adults.

“It Takes a Community” is available for free download from the SPRC website [www.sprc.org/library/It_Takes_A_Community.pdf].
No December meetings are scheduled unless otherwise marked. Dates in **bold** and in *Maersk blue* indicate alternate meeting dates intended to accommodate state holidays or other previously scheduled events.

**East Tennessee Region**
monthly, 3rd Thursday, 12 PM
Mental Health Association of East Tennessee, Inc., 9050 Executive Park Drive, Suite 104 A, Knoxville, 37923
April 15, May 20, June 17, July 15, August 19, September 16, October 21, November 18

**Memphis/Shelby County Region**
monthly, 3rd Tuesday, 11 AM
The Community Foundation of Greater Memphis, 1900 Union Avenue, Memphis, 38104
April 20, May 18, June 15, July 20, August 17, September 21, October 19, November 16

**Mid-Cumberland Region**
monthly, 2nd Thursday, 9:30 AM
Tennessee Voices for Children, 701 Bradford Avenue, Nashville, 37204
April 8, May 13, June 10, July 6, August 12, September 9, October 14, and **November 12**

**Northeast Region**
monthly, 4th Tuesday, 10 AM
Boone’s Creek Christian Church, 305 Boone’s Creek Road, Gray, 37615
April 27, May 25, June 22, July 27, August 24, September 28, October 26, and November 23

**Rural West**
monthly, 3rd Wednesday, 10:30 AM
Behavioral Health Initiatives, 36C Sandstone Circle, Jackson, 38305
April 1, May 19, June 16, July 1, August 5, September 2, October 7, and November 4

**South Central**
monthly, 1st Tuesday, 10 AM
Mental Health Cooperative, 100 Berrywood Drive, Columbia, 38401
April 9, May 7, June 4, July 2, August 6, September 3, October 1, and November 5

**Southeast Region**
monthly, 1st Thursday, 12 PM
Upper Cumberland Region
April 6, May 4, June 1, July 6, August 3, September 7, October 5, and November 2

**Upper Cumberland Region**
monthly, 4th Thursday, 9 AM
Volunteer Behavioral Health Care Systems, 1200 Willow Avenue, Cookeville, 38502
April 22, May 27, June 24, July 22, August 26, September 23, October 28, and **November 18**

**Intra-State Department Meetings**
Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities, Third Floor Conference Room, Cordell Hull Building, 425 Fifth Avenue North, Nashville, 37243
**February 14, March 14, April 14, May 13, June 14, July 13, August 14, September 13, October 12, November 12, December 14 (state holidays or other previously scheduled events).**

**Advisory Council**
June 1-2 (tentatively scheduled for Montgomery Bell State Park, 1020 Jackson Hill Road, Burns)
September 8 (Tennessee State Capitol)
Blount County Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Prevention Alliance
monthly, 1st Friday, 12 PM
Blount County Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Prevention Alliance
April 9, May 7, June 4, July 2, August 6, September 3, October 1, and November 5

**Davidson County Suicide Prevention Task Force**
monthly, 4th Thursday, 9 AM
April 28, May 27, June 24, July 22, August 26, September 23, October 29, **November 18**

**Giles County Suicide Prevention Task Force**
monthly, 3rd Monday, 1:30 PM
Giles County Career Center, 125 South Cedar Lane, Pulaski, 38478
May 17, July 19, September 20, and November 15

**Hickman County Suicide Prevention Task Force**
monthly, 4th Friday, 1:30 PM
Hickman Community Hospital, Senior Care Building, 135 East Swan Street, Centerville, 37033
April 23, May 28, June 25, July 23, August 27, September 24, October 22, and **November 19**
If you are interested in getting involved with TSPN on a local level or have other questions, contact the chairperson of your region as indicated by the map provided below:

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