

OPPOSE SB 84 and SB 85

Suicide Prevention: Mental Health Screening Revisited

Senate Bills 84 and 85 give the Texas Health and Human Services Commission carte blanche to usher in school based mental health screening. Even worse, they allow HHSC to accept donations from Big Pharma...

This session's revisiting of the so-called New Freedom initiative for mental health screening in the schools, defeated most notably in the 2005 session, bears the face of "suicide prevention."

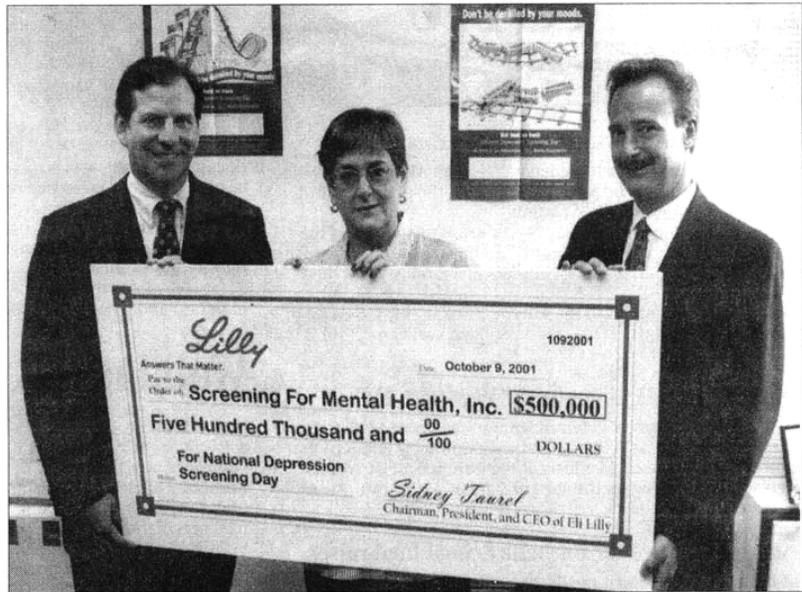
Of course, we all want to prevent suicide, but the fact is that looking for suicidal children by mental health screening is a bad idea and a waste of taxpayer funds.

Programs like Teen Screen and other ways of trying to prevent suicide by identifying at-risk young people tend to have very high rates of false positives. Shaffer et al (2004 Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 43(1), 71-79, p. 77) acknowl-

TURN OVER...

4 • Thursday, October 18, 2001 • BELMONT CITIZEN-HERALD

HAPPY RETURNS



COURTESY PHOTO

Bob Pitasi of Eli Lilly and Company (right) presents a check for \$500,000 to Screening For Mental Health, Inc. in support of the organization's annual National Depression Screening Day. Also pictured: Dr. Douglas Jacobs of Newton, founder and executive director of Screening for Mental Health, and Evie Barkin, director of the Cole Resource Center at McLean Hospital in Belmont. McLean was one of the national sponsors of National Depression Screening Day.

Signs of Suicide (SOS) is a program developed and promoted by a corporation called Screening for Mental Health, Inc.

Signs of Suicide is a program not unlike the greatly protested TeenScreen program. Screening for Mental Health (SMH) has taken MILLIONS in pharmaceutical grants to forward its program of psychiatric testing in what they say is an effort to reduce suicides, alcoholism, depression and eating "disorders" in high schools, colleges, the workplace and the military. Why would pharmaceutical companies want to support such an organization? Are they altruistic—or do they simply stand to make BILLIONS on the sale of drugs to the people who will be screened?

Fears about an increased risk of suicide led the Food and Drug Administration to issue black box warnings on all anti-depressants, which are not even approved for children by the FDA. Yet the drug companies continue to shove huge amounts of cash to SMH and similar programs to keep their companies profitable.

edge that their screening tool “would result in 84 non-suicidal teens being referred for evaluation for every 16 suicidal youths correctly identified.”

The nightmare that Aliah Gleason and her family went through here in the Austin area is a prime example (see “Medicating Aliah”, Mother Jones magazine, May 2005).

Aliah ended up taking at least 13 different psychotropic drugs. That is what happens to identified children in our system today.

These type of suicide prevention programs do not work. The United States Preventive Services Task Force found that screening for suicide risk does not reduce suicide attempts or mortality. (<http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/3rduspstf/suicide/suiciderr.htm#clinical>)

What these programs do is select out more children to get labeled, pathologised and poisoned with toxic psychotropic drugs. They are very effective marketing campaigns for the psychiatric pharmaceutical industry.

Children do not need labels and drugs, but legislators can do very real and meaningful things to prevent suicide. Probably most important is to support policies that promote good jobs and housing for family well-being, good schools and safe communities for our children.

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Probably most important is to support policies that promote good jobs and housing for family well-being, good schools and safe communities for our children.”

Help protect children, oppose SB 84 and SB 85

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