

# Surgeon general declares suicide national problem

WASHINGTON (AP) — Suicide, once only whispered about, must be boldly confronted by the nation's parents and children, doctors and schools, baseball coaches and hairdressers, Surgeon General David Satcher said last week as he declared suicide a serious national threat.

Suicide is the eighth leading cause of death, claiming about 30,000 lives each year. That compares with fewer than 19,000 homicides. And more than a half million Americans attempt suicide each year but survive.

"People should not be afraid or ashamed to seek help," Satcher said, putting his first stamp on mental health issues. "Suicide is a serious public health problem."

He issued 15 public recommendations for increasing awareness about suicide, stepping up research and encouraging intervention with people at risk.

Early next year, Satcher plans to present a "national strategy" toward suicide

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prevention that will offer more specific ideas for helping particular groups.

Older Americans, particularly men, are most likely to take their own lives. Also at heightened risk are American Indians and gay and lesbian youth.

Satcher plans a full report reviewing the science and treatments for mental illness, a first for the surgeon general's office.

Tipper Gore, the vice president's wife and a longtime advocate for mental health issues, joined Satcher to release the report and said that too often, mental illness leads to suicide.

"Millions of Americans and their families face mental illness, often alone and sometimes in fear. Too often

suicide is the result," Gore said.

Parents, teachers and others who interact with people at risk of suicide often do not realize that they can help, the report concludes.

Doris Smith of Atlanta, whose 27-year-old son committed suicide, agreed. "I did not know depression was a disease that could be treated," she said.

Victims also need to be educated that depression and other mental illnesses are treatable, said Christopher Marshall, 37, who suffered from panic attacks that nobody seemed to understand. He spoke of one day in the summer of 1994 when he walked into his father's Wardtown, Va., farm with his father's shotgun in

hand.

"I cried as I walked and wondered how I got to this place. I believed there was no other way to end this nightmare," he said. But somehow, he said, he was able to "grasp the faintest notion" that there could be hope.

"Tears streamed down my face and I put the gun down," he said. "Suicide is preventable."

Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., whose father shot himself to death in 1972, said that hearings are planned for this fall in the Senate Appropriations health subcommittee. Advocates hope it will be an important step toward getting more money and attention to the problem.

For his part, Reid encouraged Americans to talk about the issue, saying it took him 24 years to speak about his father's death in public.

Last week's report grew out of a conference on suicide prevention in Reno, Nev., last October. Some 450 experts compiled 81 recommendations. Fifteen of them were picked for immediate implementation because they had the strongest science behind them, could be implemented with current resources and could be done immediately.

Many of them involve educating the public to recognize when someone seems at risk of suicide and how to get that person help. That includes doctors and nurses, but also clergy, coaches and hairdressers — anyone who is likely to hear about someone's problems.

Specifically, the Clinton administration plans to help distribute a PBS video called "Depression: On the Edge" to school counselors to help them detect teen depression. Mrs. Gore and Satcher are also working with the Ad

Council and MTV to develop a campaign reducing the stigma of mental illness. That isn't expected until late this year or early next year.

And the Department of Health and Human Services plans to work with organizations like Meals on Wheels to identify people who may be at risk.

Other recommendations include:

-Educating the public that suicide is preventable and working to diminish stigmas of mental illness, substance abuse and suicide.

-Helping primary care doctors and nurses to learn how to recognize and treat depression, substance abuse and other mental problems associated with suicide, and increasing referrals to specialists when appropriate.

-Working with news and entertainment media to present balanced portrayals of suicide.

-Increasing research on suicide risk and prevention programs.

-Formally evaluating suicide prevention programs to determine what works.

## F.A.C.T.

(Continued from Page 2) AIDS don't have adequate health care or insurance. African-Americans with the virus or the disease often feel stifled by their race's fear of contracting the condition and having their health problems leaked to the community.

F.A.C.T. members called information on its literature claiming that "60 percent of all new HIV/AIDS cases in Clark County are African-American" a misstatement and urged people not to quibble over numbers.

"Our community has AIDS," Fleming said.

"No," said Wesley, standing and interrupting. "Members of our community have AIDS — not our community!"

"You bring this to us because we're just so used to people bringing us crumbs from the table," said Marzette Lewis, founder of the Westside Action Alliance

Korp-Uplifting People founder. "Yes, massah! Nah, massah! Ah, thank you massah is all we can say, but we won't stand for this. Don't stigmatize us so you can go back to the federal government and get some more money. You got more white folks with AIDS than anybody."

One of Nixon's daughters, Alondra Lewis, also spoke.

"I've looked around and I think I'm the youngest person in the room. Everyone's saying how this affects the children," she said.

"I go to Mojave High School, a predominantly white school, and one day, a group of white girls were talking about their ACT scores. I got a higher score than all of them. When they asked me what I got and I told them, they called me a liar. There is a stigma. The sign made me mad and sad, but we need to work together to

come up with a solution."

NAACP President Gene Collins urged the people in the room to be proactive in addressing the problem.

Long-time Westside resident Uri Clinton suggested the group apologize.

Taylor responded with an apology for "the method, but not the motivation behind it."

"If your house was burning, would you come out gently and say, 'My house is on fire.' No, you would scream," said Bruce Muhammad, a member of the Nation of Islam. "They're screaming that our house is on fire. Let's change the spirit in here. Let's get off their case. Let's change the focus,

so we can do something positive here."

During a brief question and answer-type section, Beatrice Turner threatened to get F.A.C.T. member Michael Chambliss, fired from his job as a senior city planner.

"Michael Chambliss could of lost his job over that," she said, referring to the erroneous city number on the billboards. "Y'all should have involved the community. When y'all have your next meeting, publicize it. If I don't know anything else, I know this, next time Michael let's something like this happen, he's out!"

The meeting closed on a positive note with a Yoruba priest closing with a prayer.

## Willis

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While there, he was an anchor, assignment editor, show host, producer and news director. In the mid '80s he served as general manager of KCEP-FM 88.1.

Willis was born in Fort Smith, Ark. and has a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in education administration. His wife, Debra Willis, a principal at John F. Mendoza Elementary school, will also accept a principal's position in Yonkers. Their four children will join them.

"I'm looking forward to the challenges that await me in the state of New York and Yonkers," Willis said.

"Strong parental support and good teachers are essential for students success."

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