The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: Working to Create Political Will

In 1996 the World Health Organization and the United Nations issued a report, *Prevention of Suicide: Guidelines for the Formulation and Implementation of National Strategies*, calling for the development of national strategies to address this global health problem. Of significance was the notion that suicide prevention plans must combine investments in scientific research, education and political will. This landmark report was a guiding factor in the creation of the first *U.S. National Strategy for Suicide Prevention* in 2001.

In the United States and elsewhere, most public health problems aren’t adequately addressed, nor mortality reduced, without a vocal constituency advocating for the required attention and resources. This has been true of breast cancer and HIV/AIDS and it is reasonable to think that the same will be true of suicide prevention.

Fast forward to 2009 and to the announced merger of two leading suicide prevention organizations: - the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) and the Suicide Prevention Action Network USA (SPAN USA). The merger combines AFSP’s research and education expertise with the public policy and advocacy expertise of SPAN USA, which includes passage of U.S. Congressional resolutions re-cognizing suicide as a national problem and leadership in the passage of mental health parity legislation.

FFSP’s core strength has been its support of scientific research and over the last decade its educational programs and initiatives to support those at risk for suicide and survivors of suicide loss. AFSP has established a network of 38 chapters to serve states and communities, with a dozen more expected by 2011. These chapters, along with AFSP’s Out of the Darkness walks, present new opportunities for grassroots advocacy. Five years ago there weren’t any walks; this year 50,000 people will walk in 190 walks and 250,000 family members and friends will sponsor them. Generally, walkers have been im-pacted by suicidal behavior or completed suicide and have decided to get involved. They raise awareness and funds and represent a growing constitu-ency for suicide prevention. As one walker recently expressed it, “we won’t allow suicide to continue to be ignored.”

An initial goal of the merger is to advance suicide prevention within the current U.S. debate on health reform by advocating for expanded coverage of, and access to, treatment for mental disorders, support for mental health checkups across the lifespan and better coordination of care for suicide attempt survivors and individuals with mental disorders. The long-term goal is to establish an aggressive policy agenda for suicide prevention at national, state and local levels.

Suicide is a serious problem in the United States with 33,000 reported deaths and an estimated one million attempts annually. It’s the third leading cause of death for those 15 to 24 years of age and fourth among those 18 to 65 years of age. Despite these facts, prevention research and programs suffer from a lack of funding and misconceptions and stigma continue to surround suicide. The AFSP/SPAN USA merger looks to change this by strengthening grassroots advocacy and exerting greater influence on policies and legislation … providing the political will to make suicide prevention a national priority in the U.S.

**Contributions** for the news bulletin are welcomed from other organizations. Please send any contributions to Dr Jerry Reed or contact him for advice about preparing your report. jreed330@comcast.net
WORLD SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY 2009

WSPD 2009 was observed in more than 40 countries with more than 100 educational and commemorative events, press briefings and public conferences, while Internet, Facebook (IASP has more than 700 fans!) and Twitter coverage ensured millions of people around the world were linked to WSPD activities on September 10th.

WSPD was launched at the United Nations in New York with a Press Conference for international journalists, and a three-hour public conference which addressed the theme “Suicide Prevention in Different Cultures”. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the JED foundation, LifeLine and other groups joined IASP in publicizing the event and a record crowd overflowed the UN conference room. People came to the conference not only from New York but from across the US. The person who made the longest journey to the UN Launch was Professor Chi-Yun Lin, Professor at the Institute of Life and Death Education and Counseling in the Taipei College of Nursing, and Director of Taiwan Association for Caring and Counseling for Loss.

An amazing range of activities was undertaken to mark WSPD 2009. These are listed on the IASP website and provide exciting evidence of the rapid diffusion of the WSPD concept, and inspirational ideas for events in future years. Events on the theme of Suicide Prevention in Different Cultures were held from the Vatican to Vanuatu, from Bangladesh to Belgium, and from China to the Cook Islands. We encourage you to read about these activities at www.iasp.info/wspd, view the photo archive of events in different countries and submit any photos of your own to us (to Annette.beautrais@yale.edu)

This year IASP launched a new event, Light a Candle for Suicide Prevention at 8PM, designed to enable people to meaningfully participate in, and support, WSPD even if there were no local activities. We received many comments from people who thought this was a wonderful idea.

World Suicide Prevention Day www.iasp.info

On September 10th World Suicide Prevention Day Light a candle near a window at 8 PM to show your support for suicide prevention to remember a loved one and for the survivors of suicide.

The International Association for Suicide Prevention Invites you to
Light a Candle at 8 PM

Joanne Harpel (AFSP), Dr Annette Beautrais (IASP) and Professor Chi-Yun Lin of Taiwan at the United Nations New York Launch of WSPD 2009

Kenneth Hemmerick IASP Webmaster
Kenneth Hemmerick is the IASP webmaster and responsible for recent changes to the IASP website. 

If you have not visited the website recently please do so – Kenneth has worked to update the site and added a large amount of very useful information. In addition, Kenneth worked tirelessly and with great enthusiasm and imagination to publicize World Suicide Prevention Day (WSPD) in 2009, adding lists of activities and photo archives to the website, and generating press, Facebook and Twitter publicity for both IASP and WSPD 2009. The IASP website has benefited greatly from Kenneth’s artistic talents – he graduated with distinction in Interdisciplinary Studies (Fine Arts) from Concordia University. To date, he has had 27 solo, juried and group shows in Canada, the U.S., Argentina and South Korea. He has written music for six award-winning films and his video productions. In addition, he has had exhibitions of his videos in Canada, Mexico and Cuba. His works are owned by collectors in the U.S. Canada and the UK. In 1998, he created Suicide Prevention Help (www.suicidepreventionhelp.com), in the days before Google, as he was concerned that there were websites encouraging people to commit suicide. He serves as a consultant, designer and Webmaster to the IASP in the development of their website.


Please see the website for other important congress dates www.iasp.info

XXV IASP WORLD CONGRESS
MONTEVIDEO, URUGUAY
27-31 OCTOBER 2009

The social program will include a symphony concert 28th October at the newly restored 150 year old Teatro Solís

LOS MUSIÇOS DE MI CIUDAD DEFENDEN LA VIDA CONCERTO DE BENEFICIO ARGENTINA DE MONTEVIDEO APÓYE A ULTIMO RECORSU

The XXV IASP World Congress in Montevideo, Uruguay, is coming up October 27-31, 2009. For more information, please visit www.iasp.info

XXV IASP WORLD CONGRESS

13th European Symposium on Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour

Concierto por la Vida

Los músicos de la ciudad defienden la vida

Defendamos la vida

Concerto de Beneficencia Uruguaia de Montevideo

Apoie a ultimo recurso

The 13th European Symposium on Suicide and Suicidal Behaviour will be held in Rome, Italy, from 3rd to 4th September 2010.

IASP CONGRESS MONTEVIDEO

Friday 16th October is the deadline for payments at the Secretariat of pre-registrations and hotel bookings, as well as pre-bookings for transfers and the Congress concert. After that date, registrations will be resumed on Tuesday 27th October at the Radisson Hotel at ‘On Site’ costs. You will also be able to buy Concert tickets on site.

The shuttle airport transfer cost: US$ 20 - to be booked in advance.

IASP 2009 CONGRESS SECRETARIAT
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