



CHECKUP08 ONLINE LAUNCH EVENT TRANSCRIPT – SEPTEMBER 10, 2008

Moderator : Welcome. Thanks to everyone for joining us. We will be starting in about 5 minutes. While you are waiting, feel free to check out the CheckUp08 principles and sign our online petition at <http://www.checkup08.org/petition.html>

Moderator : For those of you just joining us, we will begin in just a couple of minutes.

Moderator : On behalf of The Jed Foundation, The Columbia TeenScreen Program and all of our partners -- thank you for joining us for the launch of CheckUp08. We are very excited about this campaign and the fact that so many leading organizations have joined forces to start dialogues about the importance of providing access to mental health check-ups for all of America's young people.

Moderator : In a moment, we will start taking questions for today's guests. You can submit questions in the bottom panel of your chat screen. Please address who the question is for in the text. For example, "This question is for Donna Satow -- what does The Jed Foundation do?"

Moderator : Today we have several guests with us including Donna Satow, a co-founder of The Jed Foundation. She and her husband started the organization to prevent suicide and reduce emotional distress among college students after the loss of their youngest son, Jed.

Mort Silverman, medical advisor to The Jed Foundation and the Suicide Prevention Resource Center is also with us today. He is a respected voice in the suicide prevention community.

Laurie Flynn, Executive Director of The Columbia TeenScreen Program will also be joining us shortly.

Lastly, we are honored to have Mrs. Sharon Smith with us today. She is the wife of Senator Gordon Smith and a leading advocate for mental health. To start today's chat, Mrs. Smith wanted to share a few words about her involvement with our effort.

Sharon Smith : Thank you for the opportunity to participate in today's event to highlight the importance of mental health check-ups. As the mother of a child who lost his battle with mental illness, I am an outspoken and tenacious advocate for mental health check-ups. You see, I firmly believe that had they existed when Garrett was young we would have caught his illness early and would have been able to intervene.

Sharon Smith : Ultimately, I believe that Garrett would still be with us today if he had had the benefit of a mental health check-up. I commend TeenScreen and its other partners as they work to raise awareness about mental illness and the need for the medical profession to take the disease seriously among our young people.

Moderator : Please feel free to start submitting questions in your bottom panels. Those will be fielded to the appropriate guest and then answered in the main chat area. We encourage you to ask questions so we can all learn something about the importance of protecting the mental health of today's youth.

newyork7: This question is for Dr. Silverman. Do you think that educating general practitioners about mental health screening is an important part of prevention?

Mort Silverman : Absolutely. Yes.

thecollegiate: What type of screening does teenscreen use?

Laurie Flynn : TeenScreen uses a voluntary screening procedure that involves the use of a scientifically validated screening questionnaire followed by a brief interview with a mental health professional for those who score positive on the questionnaire. Parents of teens who are found to need further evaluation are contacted after the screening to discuss referral options.

eastman: Donna Satow...What do you hear from college students as reasons that young people are not getting help if they are having a hard time.

Donna Satow: Some of our research shows that often students are embarrassed. They often don't completely understand that emotional problems are treatable. There's a lot of stigma and they don't want to tell anybody or share this. Students share different parts of themselves with different people, so often it's hard to get a whole picture of what a student is experiencing. Sometimes they don't know that when they're feeling blue, it might be something more serious. They need to understand when something needs to be looked at. That's why screening is such an important component of mental health, it helps students organize their thinking about what might be happening to them.

The Prattler : This question is for Sharon Smith -- do you think that the medical profession does not take mental illness seriously?

Sharon Smith : I do think the medical community takes it seriously. Unfortunately, most have not had adequate training to be able to recognize the signs of a mental illness nor are they prepared to provide appropriate treatments. In fact, the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act has trained over 1,300 primary care providers and more than 3,800 mental health service providers to better identify children at risk.

Moderator : As a reminder, we have four guests to answer your questions today: Laurie Flynn from TeenScreen. Donna Satow from The Jed Foundation. Mrs. Sharon Smith, wife of Senator Gordon Smith. And Dr. Mort Silverman, a leading expert on mental health and suicide prevention.

The Prattler : This is a question for Laurie Flynn: is mental illness more common on college campuses than elsewhere? If so, why do you think that it is?

Laurie Flynn : I am not a researcher or clinician, but my understanding is that symptoms of the most serious mental illnesses tend to emerge in the high school and college years, with suicide rates being higher in the college years. Dr. Silverman may offer more input on this topic.

Mort Silverman : The onset of most major mental illnesses is between the age of 16 to 30. So, Laurie is accurate that symptoms of mental illness emerge in late adolescence and young adulthood. Suicide rates increase from the age of 14 to late 30s. College-aged students have higher suicide rates than high school students. Just to clarify, it is not that young people enrolled in college have higher rates than high school students – the rate increases with *college-aged* students.

robert : This question is for Mrs. Smith. What message would you like to share with other parents?

Sharon Smith : By seeing the signs and taking mental illness seriously parents can help save their children's lives. Our children can go through difficult times, but if we recognize the signs and help them we can get them through it.

The College Beat : What can college students do to help with the CheckUp08 Campaign?

Donna Satow: One way that students can help is to go to The Jed Foundation's partner site with MTVU, <http://www.halfofUs.com> and learn more about how to fight the stigma around mental illness. They can also sign the petition at <http://www.checkup08.org> to tell their representatives how important it is for young people to get mental health check-ups regularly. I know my son was very private about what he felt; students are just searching for ways to understand what they might be going through. Check-ups help students understand what they're experiencing and discuss it more openly.

RSP : What is the goal of CheckUp08?

Laurie Flynn : The goal of CheckUp08 is to promote access to mental health screening in routine medical and primary care settings for young people and their families. We aim to do this by seeking support from local, state and federal elected officials and public and private health care organizations because it's good public health policy.

Moderator : As an FYI - the transcript will be posted after today's chat. We will insert the questions before the answers where they didn't appear above. Please feel free to continue asking your questions for our guests..

The College Beat : For Laurie Flynn: have either of the Presidential candidates taken a position on youth mental health check-ups?

Laurie Flynn : Not specifically, although Senator Obama, through the Democratic Platform, supports early detection and services in children's mental health.

The Prattler : question for Sharon Smith: have either of the major parties' Presidential candidates come out in support of mental health checkups?

Sharon Smith : In my experience the cause to raise the profile of mental illness and get people the care they need has never been a political issue. This disease affects people of all races, economic status and even political parties. I know my husband will work with either candidate and is confident that both will understand the importance of improving and expanding access to mental health care.

L. Okpaleke : To All guests - from L. Okpaleke: As a mental health professional, I followed a suicidal student to the ER, after he admitted taking more than the recommended dose of "Tylenol". I repeated to hospital staff that child admitted having suicidal ideations, as well as to other school administrators and a prevention/intervention agency. What are your suggestions for getting others to recognize...

Mort Silverman: It's a hard thing to answer without having all the info. Generally it's important to train gatekeepers who can identify and ask about suicidal ideation and intent in individuals who are perceived to be at increased risk. Gatekeepers include community workers, emergency staff, and other first responders to the scene of the accident. A well-informed community is healthier in terms of preventing suicide.

steph4687 : The question is for Sharon Smith. What do you hope to accomplish by being involved with this campaign.

Sharon Smith : I hope that my involvement will help prevent at least one family from experiencing the tragedy my family went through. I firmly believe that had mental health check-ups existed when Garrett was young we would have caught his illness early and would have been able to intervene. Ultimately, I believe that Garrett would still be with us today if he had had the benefit of a mental health check-up.

The Prattler : Dr. Silverman, I go to an art school where many students in programs like Architecture and Industrial Design work several hours a day outside of class and often sleep in their studios. Does that sort of lifestyle contribute to mental illness?

Mort Silverman : Not necessarily, but it truly contributes to a stressful lifestyle. Decreased sleep on a regular basis is detrimental to mental functioning, including aspects of memory, calculations, perceptions, and even emotional responsiveness. Lack of appropriate nutrition and exercise can contribute to stress and the possible onset of psychological problems.

steph4687 : question for medical expert. I read an article about the rise in young suicide rates. Do you think screening could change that.

Mort Silverman : Screening is one aspect of a total prevention program. Screening in and of itself can identify at risk individuals, but there needs to be coordinated treatment and follow-up in order to prevent suicide.

Evelyn : How does a mental health check-up distinguish between normal "blues" and potential mental illness?

Laurie Flynn : CheckUp08 does not promote any particular screening model and seeks to adapt evidence-based screens to many settings. TeenScreen uses validated screening questionnaires that have a demonstrated ability to detect risk and symptoms, as well as a second-stage interview with a mental health professional to assess symptoms, impairment and the need for further evaluation.

robert : This question is for The Jed Foundation -- the press release talks about mtvU and student advocacy. What is your campaign with them?

Donna Satow: The Half of Us campaign is a national effort to reduce stigma and to increase help-seeking among college students. The campaign uses online, on-air and on campus elements to reach students where they are in a way they will understand. We have lots of high-profile artists sharing their stories like Pete Wentz and Mary J. Blige. You can learn more at www.halfofus.com

Laura D.: What would be the ideal outcome of CheckUp08?

Donna Satow: To make mental health part of the national discussion during the Presidential election. To make checking up on the state of your mental health part of students' lexicon and everyday life. You know not to drink and drive, how about knowing to check up on your mental health? The best way to do that is through screening.

Laura D. : When was the idea of the CheckUp08 campaign initiated?

Laurie Flynn : The idea of the campaign was initiated earlier this year when the national election and primary season got underway. We wanted to get children's mental health and youth suicide prevention on the national policy agenda.

Brian A - SPAN USA : Donna, you mentioned that folks can sign a petition to show support. I think individuals can also ask all candidates for U.S. Representative and Senator to support the CheckUp08 principles by sending an email directly to them and sharing their own personal story on why they support mental health checkups, correct?

Donna Satow: Yes, through the CheckUp08.org site, you can access an action alert on the SPAN USA site that allows you to email your representatives directly.

L. Okpaleke: To Laurie Flynn - Will your screening questionnaire be available to those outside the medical & primary care setting/facilities free of cost?

Laurie Flynn : Columbia University makes its materials available to qualifying communities, schools, medical settings and organizations free of charge.

Moderator : A reminder -- the checkup08.org site lets advocates get involved in several ways: you can sign a petition showing support for the CheckUp08 principles, you can link through to an action alert on SPAN USA to email your representatives directly and you can also send an email to the two Presidential campaigns.

CampusGreen : What should a parent or friend do if they think someone is struggling with mental health issues?

Donna Satow: They should speak up and help their friend by directing them to professional help. Mental illness is treatable, so if anyone suffers from any emotional disorder there are treatments available. And early detection is the whole key to taking care of it - learning about yourself, understanding your condition, and learning to live with it. That's why early detection is so important.

Moderator : We have a few more minutes for questions. If there are any important points that have been missed, feel free to submit a question.

MLM : To all: aside from signing the petition, how can the public help with CheckUp08?

Donna Satow: In addition to the action items listed above, share this campaign with your friends and people in your community. The more people discuss checkup08, the more we can influence the national discussion. Take time visit the links on checkup08.org to all of our partner organizations so that you can learn more about mental health and how to help yourself or a friend.

robert : For Mrs. Smith - I know that you and your husband were involved in some national funding for suicide prevention. Is that still going on?

Sharon Smith : Yes, the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act became law in 2004. Since its adoption, Garrett's bill has provided millions of dollars to states, tribes, colleges and universities to implement programs that identify and treat children with a mental illness. We must reauthorize the program this year to ensure we do not lose any more young Americans to suicide.

L. Okpaleke : Thank you for all your efforts in supporting Mental Health initiatives. Mental Health related questions should indeed be a part of all medical/physical exams.

Donna Satow: Thank you for your ongoing support for this important issue!

CampusGreen : Why are some people so afraid to talk about mental health and what can we do to change that?

Mort Silverman : One reason that people are afraid of talking about mental health is fear that they might be misunderstood or ridiculed for admitting to having a psychological problem. There remains a great deal of stigma regarding mental illness, despite the fact that we know that 18 - 20% of the American public has a diagnosable mental disorder. There are many myths and misunderstandings.

Moderator : I know our guests today are still working on answers to a few of your questions. We can take one or two more questions before we close.

Laura D. : Besides encouraging action and involvement through the website, what else will the campaign be doing? Will members speak at schools or attempt to get the word out in other ways?

Laurie Flynn : All members of the CheckUp08 partnership will work on education and outreach with our messages throughout this election year and beyond. We will be commenting on children's mental health policy and meeting with public officials about our recommended policy actions. In the year ahead, we may hold public forums and briefings to keep this important public health issue on the health reform agenda.

Sharon Smith : I'm sorry, but I have to leave now. With the fifth anniversary of Garrett's death just having passed yesterday, and with today being World Suicide Prevention Day, now is the time to act. Now is the time to expand our perception of health care to include mental health check-ups and ensure that all pediatricians and physicians are using appropriate techniques to screen children and provide the proper care.

Moderator : Just a reminder to encourage your friends, family and communities to use the tools available through checkup08.org so we can really put these issues on the radar screens of the candidates. Working together, we can raise the visibility of this issue and its importance.

Moderator : Thanks again for joining us today. The transcript of this chat will be housed on checkup08.org and we look forward to your feedback and involvement. Please email any additional questions or comments to info@checkup08.org. Thanks to all of our special guests for being involved today.

MLM : Are there other orgs involved in the Campaign?

Laurie Flynn : The organizations engaged in making sure that every young American is offered a mental health check-up include: Active Minds, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), Mental Health America (MHA), National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Suicide Prevention Action Network USA (SPAN USA), along with the Columbia University TeenScreen Program and The Jed Foundation.

Moderator : Thanks again for everyone's participation. We appreciate your involvement and support.

Donna Satow : Thanks for joining us. The Jed Foundation is so pleased to be part of this - we believe that early detection is the key to happy and healthy futures for our young people. Check ups are a simple way to make a huge difference in how we think about mental health. We encourage you to share this event with everyone you know to bring mental health into the national discussion.