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TeenScreen National Center for Mental Health Checkups Embraces U.S. Preventative Services Task Force Call for Depression Screening for Teens

Free In-Office Screening Materials Available for Doctors

Statement from Laurie Flynn, Executive Director

“The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommendation¹ for all teens to be routinely screened for depression by their primary care providers is a major step forward in improving teen health and reducing youth suicide in the United States. Research shows that a simple mental health checkup using a questionnaire administered in the doctor’s office can find at risk teens early. Checkups can identify teens in the easily treated stages of depression and those with other mental health problems thereby preventing disability and improving their chances for a full life.

This Task Force recommendation should be adopted by all pediatric primary care providers and family physicians as soon as possible. Private insurers and public sector health care must play a leadership role in expanding access to teen mental health checkups.

Broad-scaled availability of a mental health checkup in primary care and appropriate therapy or other care can reach many of the eleven percent of the nation’s youth currently suffering from a mental illness that causes significant impairment.

When identified early and treated appropriately, teens with depression and other mental illnesses can lead healthy and productive lives. They can succeed in school and work, develop rewarding relationships, and avoid the years of suffering experienced by those unidentified and untreated. Early identification can also reduce teen drop-out rates, juvenile crime and emergency room utilization. This is a recommendation that can save lives and money.

The TeenScreen National Center for Mental Health Checkups has enabled teens across the U.S. to receive a mental health checkup for more than 12 years and is collaborating with physicians to implement mental health checkups in primary care settings. Free materials for doctors on how to implement the Task Force recommendation are available from the TeenScreen National Center for Mental Health Checkups at <http://www.teenscreen.org/start-a-primary-care-program>.”

The April issue of *Pediatrics* also included a special article by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry titled: *Improving Mental Health Services in Primary Care: Reducing the Administrative and Financial Barriers to Access and Collaboration*. The article outlines barriers to providing collaborative mental health care in the primary care setting and suggestions for removing these barriers. One of the joint task force’s recommendations is to: “Support the emerging use of standardized tools by paying for mental health screening at routine medical visits and paying for the administration, scoring, and interpretation of standardized mental health–assessment instruments.”

Mental illness is the second leading cause of disability and premature mortality in the U.S., according to the U.S. Surgeon General. Mental illness is the leading cause of disability for people between the ages of 15 and 44, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

** Visit the following links to access the reports released today:

Improving Mental Health Services in Primary Care: Reducing the Administrative and Financial Barriers to Access and Collaboration: <http://www.aap.org/mentalhealth/>.

[1] *Pediatrics* 2009;123;1223-1228. U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Recommendation Statement Screening and Treatment for Major Depressive Disorder in Children and Adolescents: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/123/4/1248>.

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The TeenScreen National Center for Mental Health Checkups aims to educate and advocate for the early detection of mental illness in youth early by increasing access to mental health checkups as a routine part of health care. The national center's goal is to reduce and prevent disability associated with mental illness and its most serious consequence – suicide. The center partners with primary care providers, mental health organizations, and more than 500 schools and community-based programs in 43 states as well as elected officials in Washington and key state capitols to ensure youth at risk are identified and referred to services. The center currently has collaborations with managed care and primary care providers in six states.