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Health

TeenScreen's top promoter: Laurie Flynn

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June 7, 2005—On January 1, 2001, Laurie Flynn joined the Columbia University Department of Psychiatry, and became the top dog for marketing the TeenScreen program which is nothing but a clever tool invented to recruit children in public schools as customers for the pharmaceutical companies.

The truth about programs like TeenScreen and the pills Flynn is pushing were uncovered during an investigation by the US Preventive Services Task Force. A report by the Task Force released in May of 2004, determined:

- (A) There is no evidence that screening for suicide risk reduces suicide attempts or mortality.
- (B) There is limited evidence on the accuracy of screening tools to identify suicide risk.
- (C) There is insufficient evidence that treatment of those at high risk reduces suicide attempts or mortality.
- (D) No studies were found that directly address the harms of screening and treatment for suicide risk.

Prior to joining Columbia, Flynn served as the executive director of National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) for 16 years. NAMI bills itself as "a grassroots organization of individuals with brain disorders and their family members."

In reality, NAMI is the pharmaceutical industry's number one front group dedicated solely to promoting and selling as many pills as humanly possible. Which means before she hooked up with TeenScreen, Flynn was the nation's top pill pusher for 16 years.

The pharmaceutical industry has long funneled money to groups like NAMI which become conduits for spreading industry-friendly information and funding marketing schemes.

Let there be no doubt about who paid Flynn's salary at NAMI for 16 years. According to internal NAMI documents obtained by Mother Jones Magazine, between 1996 and mid-1999, 18 drug firms gave NAMI a total of \$11.72 million. The companies include Janssen (\$2.08 million), Novartis (\$1.87 million), Pfizer (\$1.3 million), Abbott Laboratories (\$1.24 million), Wyeth-Ayerst (\$658,000), and Bristol-Myers Squibb (\$613,505).

NAMI's top donor was Eli Lilly. The company gave \$2.87 million during that period. In 1999 alone, Lilly delivered \$1.1 million in quarterly installments, with most of it going to help fund NAMI's "Campaign to End Discrimination" against the mentally ill.

Let me explain the meaning of "Campaign to End Discrimination." This was a marketing scheme aimed at finding a way to force more insurance companies and government health care programs to quit

"discriminating" against pharma's mentally ill customers and pay for all the pills they want to sell to the steady stream of customers they plan to recruit with mass mental health screening projects like TeenScreen.

According to Dr Peter Breggin, psychiatrist and founder of The International Center for the Study of Psychiatry and Psychology (ICSPP), "These groups hold national meetings that bring together drug advocates to talk directly to consumers. They also put out newsletters and other information that praise medications. Sometimes they actively suppress viewpoints that are critical of drugs—for example, by discouraging the media from airing opposing viewpoints."

On March 2, 2004, Flynn took her TeenScreen marketing scam to Congress and testified at the hearing, Suicide Prevention and Youth: Saving Lives. She said: "In 2003, we were able to screen approximately 14,200 teens at these sites; among those students, we were able to identify approximately 3,500 youth with mental health problems and link them with treatment. This year, we believe we will be able to identify close to 10,000 teens in need, a 300 percent increase over last year."

Most screening programs take place in schools, Flynn said, but the program can also be implemented in residential treatment facilities, foster care settings, clinics, shelters, drop-in centers and other settings that serve youth.

Flynn said TeenScreen's goal is "to ensure that every teenager receives a mental health check-up before leaving high school."

That's right, she has a goal to get 'em hooked before they ever leave school.

TeenScreen's promotional materials claim the project is not funded by the government or drug companies. Well then somebody better arrest Flynn for lying under oath when she testified about how her fellow pill-pushing buddy, Mike Hogan, got five counties in Ohio to cough up \$15,000 a piece to set up TeenScreen.

In Ohio, Flynn told members of Congress: "We have been fortunate to work with Mike Hogan, PhD, director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health, chair of the President's New Freedom Mental Health Commission, and a member of our National Advisory Council. In February 2002, Commissioner Hogan initiated a statewide TeenScreen effort by soliciting five county mental health boards to be part of a pilot program. Over the next 10 to 18 months, the development of these screening sites was supported by staff at the TeenScreen Program as well as through a grant of \$15,000 from the Department of Mental Health to each mental health board who is participating in the pilot program (Cuyahoga County, Clermont County, Butler County, Stark County, and Wayne/Holmes Counties)."

Now why would I ever infer that Hogan is a pusher? Well for starters, on May 23, PRNewswire announced that a documentary titled, *Out of the Shadow*, which illuminates the national plight of schizophrenia is going to be screened at a meeting of 1,000 professionals. The press release said that the film would be introduced by Dr. Michael Hogan, and that the screening was supported by Janssen Pharmaceutica, a company that currently markets the same medications that Hogan and TeenScreen are pushing.

The flood of tax dollar being funneled into TeenScreen is not limited to Ohio. According to an investigation conducted by records researcher Ken Kramer, the Florida Office of Drug Control provided a \$45,000 grant to Flagler Palm Coast High School that went for TeenScreen, where the survey was used in ninth grade health class.

And according to Kramer's investigation, the Office of Drug Control provided another \$45,000 grant to a drug treatment center that went for TeenScreen.

Additionally, on November 17, 2004, officials at the University of South Florida announced receiving \$98,641 in funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for

the Florida Suicide Prevention Pilot Project to expand the TeenScreen Program efforts in the Tampa Bay area.

Flynn told Congress, "The need for increased availability of youth mental health screening is evidenced by the fact that close to 750,000 teens are depressed at any one time, and an estimated 7–12 million youth suffer from mental illness. While treatments are available for these severely disabling disorders, sadly, most children do not receive the treatment they need." Translation: "treatment" means pills.

Flynn's testimony is evidence that pharma believes it can recruit 7–12 million school kids with this profiteering scheme. Do the math and figure out how much they will make once TeenScreen has this group of consumers running to the drug store each and every month.

Phyllis Schlafly, the author of "No Child Left Unmedicated," says the marketing scheme is working. "Columbia University pilot project for screening students, called TeenScreen, resulted in one-third of the subjects being flagged as 'positive' for mental health problems. Half of those were turned over for mental health treatment. If that is a preview of what would happen when 52 million public school students are screened, it would mean hanging a libelous label on 17 million American children and forcibly putting 8 million children into the hands of the psychiatric/pharmaceutical industry."

These days one of Flynn's main duties is to keep track of teen suicides all over the country and then write letters to the editors of local newspapers to take advantage of vulnerable communities in mourning by faking compassion to get her TeenScreen marketing scheme into local public schools.

Here is Flynn hawking her wares in the Sacramento Bee on March 28, 2003, in response to an article about a teen suicide, describing how she wants to screen every teen in the country, claiming TeenScreen could "save a young person's life":

"Columbia University recently launched a national initiative to screen every teen in America for depression and suicide risk. Through its TeenScreen program, Columbia provides communities with free consultation, training, technical assistance, and screening and assessment tools. TeenScreen has been developed, implemented and evaluated over the past decade, and is one of the most effective systems available for identifying youth at risk for depression and suicide risk.

"This method of detection could save a young person's life," Flynn wrote.

Here she is on May 14, 2003, in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, throwing around bogus statistics that she obviously pulls out of her hat: "Almost one in 10 American teenagers suffers from a mental illness, and the failure to detect and treat it can have deadly consequences. Ninety percent of youth who commit suicide, the third-leading cause of death among teenagers, have depression or another diagnosable and treatable mental illness at the time of death. Research has shown that the majority of those identified as suffering from depression or suicide risk are not known by parents, school personnel or other adults to have a significant problem.

"No family is immune from the potential horror of suicide. I strongly encourage parents, health professionals, educators and others to support our initiative for the routine screening of teens to help prevent the terrible tragedy of suicide."

Here Flynn is in on June 16, 2003, the St Louis Post-Dispatch peddling TeenScreen with the *we want to save your kids "for free"* line. "TeenScreen provides communities with the tools and training necessary to identify youth at risk for suicide and/or suffering from unidentified and untreated mental illness. Columbia provides communities with consultation, training, technical assistance, and screening and assessment tools free of charge."

Flynn did Dallas on October 31, 2004, in the Dallas Morning News and played on the guilt factor by claiming teens kill themselves due to a failure (by their parents I assume), to detect and treat their mental illness. "Almost one in 10 American teenagers suffers from a mental illness, and the failure to detect and

treat it can have deadly consequences. Research has shown that 90 percent of those who commit suicide suffered from a diagnosable and treatable mental illness."

On December 9, 2004, she cranked up the guilt factor in the Boston Herald by claiming the suicide could have been prevented. "Young people cutting their own lives short is always shocking, but, unfortunately, it occurs more often than people think. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among teens today, but few are aware how many teen suicides could have been prevented through programs that screen for adolescent depression and suicide risk."

Flynn bragged to Congress about her associations with government officials in Florida and said, "TeenScreen Program staff has been working with Governor Jeb Bush to help achieve his goal of reducing suicides in the state. We have specifically collaborated with Jim McDonough, director of the Office of Drug Control, and the state Suicide Prevention Task Force. In partnership with the University of South Florida we are piloting district wide mental health screening of 9th graders in Hillsborough and Pinellas counties."

To her credit, Flynn does come across as very professional and caring in her letters to the editors and while testifying before congress.

However, this is how she really talks with her fellow marketing buddies. In an email obtained by Ken Kramer to Jim McDonough, director of the Florida Office of Drug Control, from Flynn, she wrote:

"I'm looking for a horse to ride in here! . . . I need to get some kids screened—if the schools are a road block we are interested in community organizations. Next week we are talking with the Boys and Girls Club in Pinellas. . . . I also think we should see if local agencies or businesses could be engaged in 'community screenings.'"

In my book, trying to capitalize off the pain and guilt of parents and communities who have just suffered the loss of child to suicide makes Flynn a despicable human being. I propose that local school boards tell her to take her TeenScreen survey and ride out of town on the same horse she rode in on.

Evelyn Pringle is a columnist for Independent Media TV and an investigative journalist focused on exposing corruption.