

Health

TeenScreen: Mandatory screening never entered its mind

By Evelyn Pringle

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July 16, 2005—TeenScreen recently posted a whole slew of responses to the various allegations some of us (well mostly me, I guess) have made about its screening program to "set the record straight." I began my response with the intention of responding to the whole litany of lies but decided I best break them down and cover each lie one by one or I'd be here forever.

I will cover the rest in future articles but I decided to start with this set of questions and answers posted on TeenScreen's website and I quote:

"Does the Columbia University TeenScreen Program endorse mandated mental health screening for all teens?"

"No. The Columbia University TeenScreen Program does not endorse or support government mandated screening. The TeenScreen program is offered only to communities that want to sponsor suicide prevention and mental health check-up programs. Participation in these programs by parents and teens is also always voluntary. All local TeenScreen programs require parental or guardian consent and teen assent.

"What about President Bush's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health? Didn't they endorse mandatory screening and TeenScreen?"

"The Commission did cite screening and TeenScreen as an effective approach to improving teen mental health, but did not endorse mandatory screening.

"Why then are some people worried about mandatory screening?"

"We are unaware of any elected official, health professional, corporation, government employee or organization that believes mandatory screening of all teens is a good idea. Last year as Congress was debating new mental health legislation some people incorrectly thought that the legislation would require mandatory screening. An article in the January 20, 2005 Christian Science Monitor explains what happened."

I'll start right here. Never mind the Christian Science Monitor. That reporter obviously did not read TeenScreen's Fall 2003, Newsletter with its funny little words like "requirements," and catchy phrases like "endorse it as federal policy," and I quote:

"In other good news, Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) reintroduced the Children's Mental Health Screening and Prevention Act (H.R. 3063) on September 10. The bill is modeled after the success of the Columbia University TeenScreen® Program and was introduced with our support.

"Once passed and funded, this bill will direct the federal government to collect 'proof' that preventative screening works and endorse it as federal policy. This will be accomplished through piloting screening in ten demonstration sites. Look to this newsletter for updates on the bill's progress," said the Newsletter.

It also said, "In the last edition of the newsletter, we told you about the requirements of each state to develop a suicide prevention plan. Our staff is authoring a chapter in the New York State Suicide Prevention Plan."

So not only will it be a requirement for each state to develop a suicide prevention plan, TeenScreen will be so sweet as to help them do it. Here's the paragraph that TeenScreen posted on its website from the Christian Science Monitor in answer to the questions above:

"Throughout last summer and into the fall the news crept across websites and spilled onto talk radio: The Bush administration was planning to screen every American child for mental-health problems and put those deemed in need of help on powerful psychotropic drugs. Parental rights would be taken away, and the stigma of mental illness would stain the school records of innocent children. Libertarians and conservatives, home-schoolers and psychiatric rights groups, expressed their concerns. Yet so far, the fears seem overblown... By the time Congress passed its enormous spending bill late last fall, only \$20 million of new money was appointed as a grant to states to explore new ways of coordinating their "fragmented" mental-health services. The provision contained no mandate that the money be spent to screen children."

The Monitor says there is no provision that the money be spent on screening kids? What was Queen Bee, Laurie Flynn, talking about in the 2004 TeenScreen Annual Report then while giving an overview of the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act, and said, and I quote:

(1) This legislation, signed in October 2004 by President Bush, offers local communities and Native American tribes up to \$82 million in assistance to implement and expand programs like TeenScreen.

(2) Provides grants to states, public organizations, and nonprofits for the development of youth suicide prevention and intervention strategies

(3) Authorizes funds for a variety of programs related to suicide prevention and intervention, including a priority for youth mental health screening programs—such as TeenScreen

(4) Requires that at least 85 percent of the funds be dedicated to implementing youth suicide prevention strategies

The author on TeenScreen's website should have looked back on some of the past statements made by people pushing this suicide BS.

The next question I will respond to is TeenScreen's answer to this question:

"But aren't the commission and TeenScreen in favor of universal screening? Aren't mandatory and universal the same thing?"

Here's where we get a lesson in definitions. I thought I was losing it when I first read TeenScreen's definition of universal because that's not what I thought it meant. So I looked it up in my dictionary which said universal means entire, total, world-wide, complete, and unanimous which is what I thought to begin with. However, this is how TeenScreen defines "universal" on its website and I quote:

"Universal screening and mandatory screening are different ideas. The goal of screening is to find teens who may be silently suffering from depression and other mental disorders that put them at risk of injury, suicide, substance abuse and poor academic achievement. Universal screening means to offer voluntary screening to as many teens as possible because many mental disorders, especially depression, are often impossible to detect by just looking at a teen.

"The opposite of universal screening is selective screening, where screening is offered only to teens that are showing clear signs of a problem. Selective screening unfortunately misses many teens that would otherwise go unnoticed."

Now what the hell does that mean? After reading those two paragraphs, I know how a dog must feel while chasing his tail.

But the Bush Commission's report makes it clear that the goal is to screen adults and children and states, "The early detection of mental health problems in children and adults—through routine and comprehensive testing and screening—will be an expected and typical occurrence."

I'll be anxious to see what TeenScreen's meaning of the term, "screening—will be an expected and typical occurrence," is.

On its website, TeenScreen now says they only want to offer a survey to as many teens as possible. I thought I read somewhere that TeenScreen was on a mission to screen every child before graduation from high school.

I took a moment to go and check, and my memory was correct. Here's the tune that TeenScreen was singing about the Bush report in its Newsletter in the fall of 2003:

"We are pleased that the report focuses on children's mental health and has taken a strong stance in support of youth mental health check-ups and school-based mental health care. We are even more pleased, however, to report that the commission has named the Columbia TeenScreen® Program a model program for early intervention. This recognition will raise the profile of our program, as well as our mission to provide every child a mental health check-up before high-school graduation.

So then guess what TeenScreen did to try achieve its mission? It went and took out ads in the New York Times and Washington Post, according to its newsletter and I quote:

"In order to continue with the momentum created by the recognition received from the New Freedom Commission, we are running public service advertisements in The New York Times and The Washington Post to raise awareness of our new report entitled 'Catch Them Before They Fall.' This report outlines the actions that policymakers, parents, educators, and health professionals can take to implement screening programs in their communities."

I wonder if the average Joe realizes how much money it costs to run ads in those two papers. Let's just say lots.

But not to worry, even if Bush and the drug companies don't succeed in getting their mandatory screening schemes set up, Illinois has come up with a way to get around that problem. As part of implementing what has been referred to as the model plan, Illinois is going to train and designate certain people to watch kids and identify signs of mental illness, which means every time a kid sets foot on the school grounds he or she can wonder who might be looking for indications that they might be crazy.

And that ain't all. The Bush initiative plans to provide "social and emotional check-ups" in all primary healthcare facilities, which means parents and kids both can wonder whether they are being assessed for a mental illness every time they set foot into a doctor's office.

Don't let anybody fool you, any kid they decide is mentally ill will be put on drugs. A survey of recently trained child psychiatrists found that only one in 10 children in their practices does not receive a medication. So that means the odds are 10 to 1. A kid would have better odds at a blackjack table in Vegas.

Isn't life grand now that we have Big Brother backed by the pharmaceutical industry?

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