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HOLLYWOOD, HEALTH & SOCIETY

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HIV AND BREAST CANCER STORYLINES NAMED AS FINALISTS FOR THE SENTINEL FOR HEALTH AWARD FOR DAYTIME DRAMA

Los Angeles –Two soap opera storylines have qualified as finalists for the third annual Sentinel for Health Award for Daytime Drama. The health storylines selected as finalists by topic experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are “HIV Storyline” from *The Bold & the Beautiful*, and “Ashley’s Breast Cancer” from *The Young & the Restless*. The HIV storyline focuses on a young man, Tony, who learns he is HIV positive, but goes on to live a full life—he marries his girlfriend and adopts a young boy from Africa orphaned when his mother died from AIDS. The breast cancer storyline addresses the controversy about screening recommendations and portrays the emotional issues and treatment decisions that a main character, Ashley, faces when she is diagnosed and treated for breast cancer.

The announcement was made by Hollywood, Health & Society, the CDC-funded program at the USC Annenberg School Norman Lear Center which administers the award. The winner will be selected by a panel of entertainment, academic, advocacy, and public health professionals. Finalists and the winner will be recognized during a luncheon program at the Soap Summit conference, Oct. 26, 2002 at the Century Plaza Hotel in Los Angeles. The image of women in the soaps will be addressed at this two-day educational conference, which is presented by Population Communications International for writers and producers of daytime dramas.

The Sentinel award recognizes exemplary achievements of daytime drama storylines that

inform, educate, and motivate viewers to make choices for healthier and safer lives. “People who watch soaps are not only entertained, they are also educated with information that affects the lifestyle choices they make. This can have a large impact on their health,” said Martin Kaplan, associate dean of the USC Annenberg School for Communication and director of the Norman Lear Center. “That is why we are pleased to honor exemplary storylines by daytime dramas in partnership with the CDC.”

The 1999 Healthstyles Survey showed that nearly half (48%) of regular viewers of soap operas—those who watch at least twice a week—learned about a disease or how to prevent it from a soap opera. More than one-third (34%) took some action as a result, like discussing it with others, giving advice, or calling a doctor. “Through their storytelling, writers and producers can influence audience members to prevent a disease or injury, and to seek early diagnosis and treatment,” commented Vicki Beck, director of Hollywood, Health & Society.

Data from the Healthstyles Survey indicate soap opera viewers tend to have more health concerns and more negative beliefs about disease prevention than non-viewers and seek out health information more than non-viewers, but have greater difficulty understanding the information they read. (The Healthstyles Survey is a proprietary database developed by Porter Novelli. The data on soap opera viewers was analyzed by the CDC and findings were reported at the 128th American Public Health Association Annual Meeting & Exposition in 2000.)

Hollywood, Health & Society provides entertainment industry professionals with accurate and timely information for health storylines. It serves as a one-stop-shop for writers, producers, and others in search of credible information on a wide range of public health topics. The Lear Center works with the CDC and its partner organizations to offer expert briefings on health issues; panel discussions at the Writers Guild of America, west; expert consultation on storylines; health tip sheets; and an innovative Web site, **entertainment.usc.edu/hhs**.

The Norman Lear Center is a multidisciplinary research and public policy center exploring implications of the convergence of entertainment, commerce, and society. Based at the USC

Annenberg School for Communication, the Lear Center works to bridge the gap between the entertainment industry and academia, and between them and the public. For more information, visit **entertainment.usc.edu**.

Located in Los Angeles at the University of Southern California, the Annenberg School for Communication is among the nation's leading institutions devoted to the study of journalism and communication and their impact on politics, culture, and society. With an enrollment of more than 1500 graduate and undergraduate students, USC Annenberg offers B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in journalism, communication, and public relations. For more information, visit **ascweb.usc.edu**.

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