

PUBLIC HEALTH EXPERTISE BROUGHT TO ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY BY USC ANNENBERG'S NORMAN LEAR CENTER

Contact: Geoffrey Baum, 213-821-1491

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LOS ANGELES — USC Annenberg's Norman Lear Center is launching Hollywood, Health & Society, a new program that provides entertainment industry professionals with accurate and timely information for health storylines. Funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the project recognizes the profound impact that entertainment media have on individual behavior. The CDC has worked with the entertainment industry for years, providing information on topics ranging from HIV/AIDS to breast cancer. This new partnership will enhance the Atlanta-based CDC's efforts.

"This project is both exciting and important," says Geoffrey Cowan, dean of the USC Annenberg School for Communication. "Studies have shown that entertainment can inform and influence people. We are delighted the Lear Center will be serving the entertainment industry and society through this new partnership with the CDC."

Hollywood, Health & Society has assembled a distinguished advisory board drawn from the entertainment industry, public health and academia, co-chaired by Neal Baer, M.D., writer/executive producer of *Law & Order: SVU*, and Victoria Riskin, president of the Writers Guild of America, west. Its members include Kary Antholis, HBO Films Vice President; Carole Black, Lifetime Television president; John Connolly, AFTRA national president; Barbara Corday, USC Cinema-Television School production chair; Jonathan Fielding, M.D., Los Angeles County Public Health director; Lucy Johnson, CBS TV senior vice president for daytime; Jeffrey Koplan, M.D., director of the CDC; Douglas Lowenstein, Interactive Digital Software Association president; Thom Mount, producer; Stephen M. Ostroff, M.D., associate director for epidemiologic science at the CDC's National Center for Infectious Diseases; Bruce Ramer, entertainment attorney; Hilary Rosen, president of the Recording Industry Association of America; and Bryce Zabel, president of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences.

"Entertainment is, of course, a business," says Martin Kaplan, associate dean of the USC Annenberg School for Communication and director of the Norman Lear Center, "driven by the profit motive and protected by the First Amendment. There's an inherent tension in our society between freedom and responsibility, between being consumers and being citizens." Adds Kaplan, who is principal investigator of Hollywood, Health & Society, "Our project aims to respect that essential balance."

Directing the project is Vicki Beck, M.S., who until earlier this year directed the Entertainment-Education Program at the CDC's headquarters in Atlanta. In surveys conducted by Porter Novelli during 1999 and 2000, nearly one-half of regular prime-time viewers, and one-third of regular daytime viewers, reported that they took some action after hearing about a health issue or disease on a TV show.

The Lear Center will help the CDC supply writers and producers of all types of

entertainment content with accurate health information through individual briefings, special seminars, expert consultation, and through an innovative Web site, entertainment.usc.edu/hhs. In order to encourage more accurate portrayals of health topics in daytime drama, the Lear Center program will work with the CDC to conduct the Sentinel for Health Award for Daytime Drama. This award recognizes exemplary achievements of daytime dramas that inform, educate and motivate viewers to make choices for healthier and safer lives. The award is staged annually at the Soap Summit conference for writers and producers of U.S. soap operas.

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 USC 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, see annenberg.usc.edu.