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Mental Health America of Texas Enters Virtual World to Combat Teen Suicide

*Over 100,000 high school teachers in Texas will soon be eligible to
participate in an innovative online suicide prevention training simulation
designed to identify students in mental distress*

AUSTIN, TX. Wednesday, September 08, 2010 — In observance of National Suicide Prevention Week, September 5-11, Mental Health America of Texas today will unveil a new online interactive training simulation for Texas high school educators to help stop teen suicides. With a grant funded by the Texas Department of State Health Services, *At-Risk for High School Educators*, based on educational gaming technology, uses innovative role-playing simulation, which will help educators recognize warning signs and refer at-risk youth experiencing psychological distress and thoughts of suicide. The news conference will take place at 1 p.m., Texas Association of Counties Bldg., located at 1210 San Antonio St., First Floor Lobby.

“We recognize that most teens are accustomed to learning and receiving information in a computer-based environment,” said Lynn Lasky Clark, LMSW, president and CEO of Mental Health America of Texas. “Our goal is to use this technology to get students and educators to begin discussing warning signs and to ask about thoughts of suicide in a non-threatening way. Suicidal crises tend to be brief; therefore, we believe this new technology developed by Kognito Interactive will provide for early detection and save lives.”

Mental Health America of Texas partnered with Kognito Interactive, Texas Education Agency, teachers, counselors and administrators from the Austin ISD, Dallas ISD, and hundreds of Texas educators and mental health experts to develop *At-Risk for High School Educators*.

Educational Strategy Based on Gaming

The online training, *At-Risk for High School Educators*, was designed with leading mental, behavioral and educational experts in Texas and across the nation and provides practice managing challenging conversations with students in distress.

Learners assume the role of a high school teacher and engage in practice conversations with emotionally responsive student avatars exhibiting signs of depression, thoughts of suicide, and drug abuse.

In the virtual role plays, users learn motivational interviewing techniques to broach the topic of psychological distress, motivate the at-risk student to seek help and avoid common pitfalls. The training is free to all Texas public high school educators and available at www.mhatexas.org.

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Importance of *At-Risk for High School Educators Training*

Austin/Travis County has had the highest rate of deaths by suicide of major Texas counties since 2000, and the Central Texas area has also experienced at least two suspected youth suicide clusters (one in 2000-2001 and one in 2007-2008.)

Each year more than 2,300 Texans die from suicide and Texas loses between 80 to 90 youths a year to suicide. According to a CDC study, over 14 percent of high school students had seriously considered suicide in the previous 12 months, and it is this age group that is the focus for the new training.

“Anxiety, depression, thoughts of suicide, and substance abuse are an unfortunate part of many high school students lives. During Suicide Prevention Week, September 5-11, we recognize that suicide is preventable, and this training for educators is a step forward in preventing needless deaths,” said Clark.

About MHA Texas

Mental Health America of Texas is dedicated to promoting mental health, preventing mental disorders and substance abuse, and achieving recovery from mental illnesses and addictions through education and advocacy.

Mental Health America of Texas is the oldest citizens' mental health advocacy and education organization in Texas. Mental Health America of Texas was founded in 1935 as a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization.

About Kognito

Kognito is a developer of web-based, interactive training simulations and educational games that address strategic business and training challenges. Since 2003, our Kognito team of psychologists, learning experts, and game designers has been leading the way in using cutting-edge game technology and empirical research in social behavior to produce evidence-based training experiences for Fortune 500 companies, government entities, and universities. Kognito work has won numerous awards including the 2007 and 2008 Learning Leader Awards from Bersin & Associates. For more information visit www.kognito.com.

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NOTE TO EDITOR – A demonstration suicide prevention training can be viewed at www.Kognito.com.