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SENTINEL FOR HEALTH AWARDS HONORS *LAW & ORDER: SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT* FOR STORYLINE ON FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME
Network, cable shows win for portrayals of HIV, alcoholism and sexually transmitted diseases

LOS ANGELES – Hollywood, Health & Society, a partnership of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and the USC Annenberg School’s Norman Lear Center, today announced the winners of the fifth annual Sentinel for Health Awards. The NBC prime time drama *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* received two awards—first place in prime time drama for “Choice,” a storyline on fetal alcohol syndrome, and third place in the same category for a storyline titled “Shaken,” about shaken baby syndrome. The CBS soap opera *The Young & The Restless* won for the third time since 2001, taking first place in daytime drama for a storyline about a teen with chlamydia, “Lily and Kevin: The Danger Within.”

The Lifetime drama *Strong Medicine* took first place for prime time minor storyline with “Heartbeats and Deadbeats,” a storyline about HIV/AIDS in the elderly. The UPN show *One on One* took first place in prime time comedy for a storyline about alcoholism, “No More Wire Hangers.” The awards were presented at a ceremony held at the Writers Guild of America, west in Los Angeles.

The Sentinel for Health Awards recognize exemplary achievements of television storylines that inform, educate and motivate viewers to make choices for healthier and safer lives. The winners were selected from among 10 finalists by a panel of entertainment professionals and health communications experts. The WB show *Everwood* received second place in prime time drama for its storyline “Sick,” about a character with HIV; and the NBC show *American Dreams* was a finalist in prime time drama for the storyline “Will’s Post-Polio Sequelae.” The CBS show *Judging Amy* received second place in prime time drama minor storyline for “Christenings,” about a teen girl with anorexia; and the NBC show *ER* was a finalist in the same category for the “The Elgin Storyline,” about an overweight teen with hypertension. The WB show *Grounded for Life* was recognized as a finalist in prime time comedy for the storyline “Pressure Drop,” about an adult with hypertension.

“Television has tremendous potential to influence viewers,” said Martin Kaplan, associate dean of the USC Annenberg School for Communication and director of the Norman Lear Center. “With storylines focusing on crucial health issues like teen obesity, this year’s winners demonstrate the positive use of that power.”

CDC analysis of data from the 2001 Healthstyles Survey shows that over half (57%) of regular viewers of prime time/daytime dramas—those who watch at least twice a week—learned about a disease or how to prevent it from a TV program in the past year. More than one-third (34%) took some action as a result, like discussing it with others, giving advice or calling a doctor.

“TV writers and producers are doing much more than entertaining audiences,” said Vicki Beck, director of the Lear Center’s Hollywood, Health & Society project and former director of the CDC’s program for entertainment education. “When you see the number and variety of health topics portrayed in daytime and prime time shows, it’s obvious that TV can be an important channel for health information as well as a source of entertainment—something we are eager to encourage.”

First-round judging for the Sentinel for Health Awards was conducted by more than 100 topic experts who evaluated accuracy of health depictions. Twenty expert panels participated in this activity at the CDC. The 10 finalists were then evaluated at USC by an expert panel representing entertainment, academic and public health organizations. The second-round judges scored finalists on entertainment value and potential benefit to the viewing audience.

The Sentinel for Health Awards were established in 2000 and previously recognized four daytime drama storylines as winners: “Viki’s Breast Cancer,” *One Life to Live* (2000); “Raul’s Diabetes,” *The Young and the Restless* (2001); “Tony’s HIV,” *The Bold and the Beautiful* (2002) and “Neil’s Alcoholism,” *The Young and the Restless* (2003). This is the first year the awards have honored storylines from prime time dramas and comedies.

Funded by the CDC and NCI, Hollywood, Health & Society provides entertainment industry professionals with accurate and timely information for health storylines, including free consultations and briefings with CDC and NCI experts. It is based at the USC Annenberg School’s Norman Lear Center as a one-stop-shop for writers, producers and others in search of credible information on a wide range of public health topics. For more information about resources for writers, go to the Hollywood, Health & Society Web site at www.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 www.learcenter.org.

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 1,700 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 www.annenberg.usc.edu.

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