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## USC Annenberg's Hollywood, Health & Society receives grants from Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and The California Endowment to launch new initiatives

Sandra Buffington named new program director of Norman Lear Center project

LOS ANGELES, April 7, 2008 -- Two prestigious new grants, including a grant to the University of Southern California from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, are expanding the scope and ambition of **Hollywood, Health & Society** (HH&S), the pioneering health communication program working with the television and film community, now in its seventh year at the USC Annenberg School for Communication's Norman Lear Center.

A three-year grant of over \$1.37 million from the Gates Foundation will enable HH&S to develop an entertainment-education strategy to increase U.S. public support for global initiatives to reduce health disparities and disease around the world. Main goals of the new effort include increasing the accurate presentation of global health topics, such as HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, in popular primetime TV shows; and increasing understanding and support among TV viewers of global health programs that can save lives and reduce disease, especially in Africa.

A two-year grant of nearly \$500,000 from The California Endowment will enable HH&S to develop an entertainment-education program that supports The Endowment's priority to advance effective policies and programs to help build communities that support children, youth and families. Through a focus on storylines about how neighborhood environments affect health and critical issues such as obesity prevention, the prevalence of violence, and health disparities, HH&S will seek to increase awareness of these issues and most importantly, of comprehensive policies to address them.

"Film and television have the power to educate and inspire," said **Joe Cerrell**, director of global health policy and advocacy for the Gates Foundation. "The Norman Lear Center's Hollywood, Health & Society program has a proven track record of working with top writers and producers to build awareness of critical health issues. We are excited that the Lear Center is expanding its work to inform the public about solutions to major global health challenges such as AIDS and malaria."

**Robert K. Ross, M.D.**, president and chief executive officer of The Endowment, commented, "We know that we need to level the playing field between communities so that children can achieve and prosper; that we should prevent problems in communities before they happen by tackling community health; and most of all that we can be more ingenious about how we solve

health problems in communities. But the way forward can be a difficult story to tell, and the media is a powerful tool to help us see solutions in action. We're excited to partner with Hollywood, Health & Society to show that there are policy and systems changes that help build healthy communities for the long haul."

\$3.2 million of core funding for HH&S has been provided to date by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, which in 2007 announced that HH&S won a new competitive five-year extension of its award.

**Sandra de Castro Buffington, M.P.H.**, a global public health professional with nearly 30 years experience, has been appointed new program director of HH&S. Formerly vice president of the Centre for Development and Population Activities in Washington, D.C., she guided the flagship WomenLead program to equip, mobilize and empower women globally and nurtured a network of 5,000 alumni in 140 countries. With USAID, she led the development of a \$250 million strategic framework for global health leadership and management and managed a \$108 million portfolio of strategic communication programs worldwide.

Buffington coordinated the first international *Entertainment for Social Change* conference at the USC Annenberg School to leverage the power of the entertainment industry for social transformation worldwide. She is a former associate faculty member at The Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health and a past board member of the Pan American Health and Education Foundation.

"I am delighted we have been able to recruit Sandra Buffington to lead this program into the future," said **Ernest J. Wilson, Ph.D.**, dean of the USC Annenberg School for Communication. "She has unparalleled experience in using entertainment-education to build support for efforts to improve public health in the U.S. and abroad."

Joining Buffington as the new HH&S project manager will be **Kathy Le, M.P.H.** As the former coordinator of the program for the past two years, Le brings experience in health communication, health promotion and entertainment-education. She graduated from the USC Keck School of Medicine in 2006 with a Master's in Public Health. Prior to obtaining her master's degree, she spent two years at Novartis (formerly Chiron Corporation) conducting infectious disease and cancer research. Le also holds a B.S. in Biological Sciences from the University of California, Davis.

The principal investigator of HH&S is **Martin Kaplan, Ph.D.**, director of the Norman Lear Center, and holder of the Norman Lear Chair in Entertainment, Media and Society at the USC Annenberg School. "Six out of 10 Americans who watch primetime dramas say they learn something about a disease or how to prevent it from a TV series," said Kaplan. "With these two new grants, we're excited to be able to be a resource to the creative community not only on disease, but also on broader questions of health policy, from the community arena to the globe."

The Norman Lear Center's Hollywood, Health & Society project has been an effective source for the entertainment community to get accurate health information as they produce programming that touches millions of people. Through outreach to writers, producers and directors; expert

briefings and consultations; media content analysis; audience impact analysis, professional presentations and academic publications, the Lear Center's HH&S program has become known in Hollywood as a free, reliable source of accurate health information for the entertainment industry. Its distinguished advisory board is co-chaired by Patric Verrone, the president of the Writers Guild of America, west, and Neal Baer, M.D., executive producer of *Law and Order: SVU*. For more information about HH&S, go to [www.usc.edu/hhs](http://www.usc.edu/hhs).

The California Endowment's mission is to expand access to affordable, quality health care for underserved individuals and communities, and to promote fundamental improvements in the health status of all Californians. For more information, visit [www.calendow.org](http://www.calendow.org).

The Norman Lear Center is a multidisciplinary research and public policy center exploring the impact of entertainment and society. On the University of Southern California campus, the Lear Center builds bridges between eleven schools whose faculty study aspects of entertainment, media, and culture. Beyond campus, it bridges the gap between the entertainment industry and academia, and between them and the public. Through scholarship and research; through its programs of visiting fellows, conferences, public events, and publications; and in its attempts to illuminate and repair the world, the Lear Center works to be at the forefront of discussion and practice in the field. For more information, go to [www.learcenter.org](http://www.learcenter.org).

Located in Los Angeles at the University of Southern California, the USC Annenberg School for Communication ([www.annenberg.usc.edu](http://www.annenberg.usc.edu)) 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 1,900 graduate and undergraduate students, USC Annenberg offers degree programs in journalism, communication, public diplomacy and public relations.

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