



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

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COUNTY AIMS TO END STIGMA OF MENTAL ILLNESS ***May is Mental Health Month;*** ***Anti-Stigma Demonstration, Quilt Unveiling, and Flashlight Vigil Take Place May 29***

The San Diego County Health and Human Services Agency's (HHSA) Mental Health Services division and its many partners are celebrating Mental Health Month with a series of events aimed at reducing the stigma associated with mental illness.

"I'm proud that we can partner with a strong, active coalition of organizations to get people the mental health services they need so they can lead healthier lives," said Chairman Greg Cox of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors.

"The fear of rejection and discrimination prevents people with a mental illness from getting access to needed mental health services. Mental Health Month and other awareness campaigns are helping change the way people with a mental illness are viewed," added Alfredo Aguirre, Director of HHSA's Mental Health Services division. **Aguirre and other County mental health experts are available to discuss this and other mental illness issues.**

The month will culminate with a countywide anti-stigma demonstration, the unveiling of the Mental Health Awareness Quilt and a flashlight vigil. The event will take place Thursday, May 29, 2008 from 7:30-8:30 p.m. at the Organ Pavilion in Balboa Park.

Special guest Kitty Dukakis, author and wife of former presidential candidate Michael Dukakis, will talk about her constant battle with depression and how electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) has helped her deal with her mental illness.

"We will shine a light on mental illness and make a statement that the stigma should end," said Sharron Hedenkamp, Executive Director of The Meeting Place, Inc. which, together with Mental Health Services and Sharp Healthcare, is spearheading the event.

Mental Health Services provides a vast array of services including mental health assessments, individual, family, and group therapy, special services for children, crisis intervention and psychiatric emergency care. The County also provides a 24-hour, multi-lingual Access and Crisis Line at (800) 479-3339.

"A person's mental health is key to leading fulfilling, healthy, and productive lives," said Aguirre. "We want to remind people that they are not alone. We are here to help."

A complete listing of Mental Health Month events is available at the County's Network of Care website at: <http://sandiego.networkofcare.org/mh/home/>. ###