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For Immediate Release

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UHS' Mental Health Services awarded suicide prevention grant

AMHERST, Mass. – The Mental Health Services (MHS) division of University Health Services at UMass Amherst has been awarded a three-year, \$300,000 federal grant to expand its suicide prevention efforts. The university is one of only 22 schools awarded a grant under the \$6.3 million program.

The funding from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) will allow MHS to build upon a 'gatekeeper' model implemented in 2006. The approach trains key individuals and groups to recognize students at risk of suicide and provide appropriate intervention; an evaluation component documents achievements and outcomes.

Over the past three years, project coordinator Kerry M. Morrison, Psy.D., and her staff have trained campus healthcare providers, housing staff, administration, faculty, coaches, fraternity and sorority leaders, police and others. New monies will help increase educational capacity; engage off-campus first responders, healthcare providers and families; enhance student and staff awareness and response; and promote the importance of seeking help for behavioral health concerns.

"Nearly a quarter of a million students in colleges and universities each year attempt suicide," said SAMHSA Acting Administrator Eric Broderick, D.D.S., M.P.H. "This national tragedy demands a strong pro-active approach – reaching out to all those at risk with information and services that give real help and hope."

College students can face serious mental and behavioral health issues, including depression and binge drinking. "The challenge for mental health professionals is how to identify and help them; nationwide, fewer than 20% of students who die by suicide are past or current clients of their school's counseling center," noted MHS director and project principal investigator Harry Rockland-Miller, Ph.D., "However, students who do connect with services often benefit significantly. UMass Amherst surveys have shown that over 80% of those who sought mental health care said services helped them stay in school and improve academic performance."

The grant team also includes program evaluator Christina Citino of UMass Amherst's Donahue Institute; Linda Scott, Ph.D., MHS' Assistant Director for Consultation and Education; and graduate assistant James Brenchley.

UHS, UMass Amherst's fully accredited health center, serves students, faculty and staff. The center offers comprehensive care, referral and education services, with a special focus on the health needs and concerns of students. For more information, visit www.umass.edu/uhs.

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INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITIES:

- Harry Rockland-Miller, Ph.D., Director, Mental Health Services
- Kerry Morrison, Psy.D., suicide prevention grant coordinator, Mental Health Services