

MINDS ON THE EDGE: Facing Mental Illness
Connects the Dots to Examine a
Badly Broken Mental Health Care System

Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer, Nobel-Prize-winning neuroscientist Dr. Eric Kandel, Pulitzer-nominated journalist Pete Earley, and other distinguished panelists from law, medicine, and public policy wrestle with the challenges of mental illness

Fred Friendly Seminar moderated by Frank Sesno premieres on PBS beginning October 1 (check local listings)

It's your brother, your daughter, or perhaps your best friend struggling with mental illness, and you don't understand why it is so difficult to get them the help they need. And then the problem escalates when an incident occurs and the police are called to the scene. Why has mental illness become an issue for the criminal justice system? And what would you do to get treatment for someone you love?

Moderated by Frank Sesno, *MINDS ON THE EDGE: Facing Mental Illness* zeros in on wrenching situations that are playing out every day in hospital ERs, on city streets and school campuses, in courtrooms and in jails, as Americans struggle with serious mental illnesses like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. As the dramatic scenario of this Fred Friendly Seminar unfolds, it reveals the personal dilemmas facing individuals and families, the medical practices that can be obstacles to treatment, and the public policies that are falling short. *MINDS ON THE EDGE* describes a mental health care system that one panelist calls "the definition of insanity."

MINDS ON THE EDGE premieres on PBS stations beginning October 1 (check local listings). It brings together program panelists with compelling personal and professional perspectives on the challenges of mental illness. U.S. Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer is shocked to discover that acts of kindness and caring may be illegal. Nobel-prize-winning neuroscientist Eric Kandel asserts that compassion is an important foundation for treatment for this "disease of the brain." Law professor Elyn Saks, who has lived with chronic schizophrenia for over 30 years, describes the nightmare of a psychotic break even as her eloquent intelligence and distinguished accomplishments embody the potential for recovery. Journalist Pete Earley, whose son developed mental illness four years ago, describes the frustration of a parent faced with a system designed to ensure freedom of choice for individuals who might not have the capacity to recognize the meaning of those choices.

Moderator Frank Sesno introduces the panelists to two stories, using the signature Fred Friendly Seminars format of a hypothetical situation drawn from real life to probe difficult issues. The program begins with Olivia, a young woman in college showing troubling signs of the onset of bi-polar disorder, an affliction that often strikes at this age. The panelists explore the dilemmas confronting a university professor who observes her behavior, realizes Olivia is ill but is unsure how to approach her. Given legal privacy protections for students, is it even legal to contact her parents? The panelists also consider the limited options available to Olivia's anguished mother and father, who are desperate to get her treatment but are blocked by a legal standard that safeguards individual liberty by prohibiting involuntary medical intervention unless there is a condition of "imminent danger."

The program also delves into the hypothetical story of James, an adult who has coped with his mental illness until his mother dies. His critical support gone, James's mental health unravels. He is unable to get treatment, keep his job or maintain his home. He becomes homeless. Finally, he is arrested for a minor crime and engulfed into a criminal justice system that is both inadequate and inappropriate for dealing with a person suffering from severe mental illness. Panelists including Pennsylvania's Secretary of Public Welfare Estelle Richman, housing advocate Sam Tsemberis, and Judge Steven Leifman describe the merry-go-round of homelessness and jail that has become the common consequence of a fragmented and dysfunctional mental health care system.

When moderator Frank Sesno asks the panelists what approaches might provide a better outcome, there is no shortage of suggestions. Supported housing, continuity of care, peer-to-peer counseling, employment opportunities, and innovative criminal justice practices like Crisis Intervention Training [CIT] training for police officers and mental health courts are enthusiastically recommended as cost-effective alternatives to a system widely acknowledged as badly broken.

MINDS ON THE EDGE is designed as a multiplatform media project. A robust website has already launched at www.mindsontheedge.org. Additional information about best practices in providing support and treatment for mental illness will be provided online beginning October 1 along with background on the science of mental illness, the intersection of law and mental illness, and interactive features that enable citizens to participate in a civic dialogue about the issues. A lively digital community with hundreds of followers has already formed around this project on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. A wide variety of national citizen and professional associations are extending

the impact of the project through screening events at national conferences and in grassroots settings. A Viewer's Guide and other outreach tools are already available online at the project website to support these events. The activities of many organizations that are using the program with their constituents and communities are reported in the "IMPACT" section of the project website.

MINDS ON THE EDGE is a production of Fred Friendly Seminars, Inc., presented on PBS by WNET.org. Executive producer: Richard Kilberg. Executive Director: Barbara Margolis. Producer: Dominique Lasseur. Writer: Joan Greco. Broadcast Producer/Director: Mark Ganguzza. Senior Producer: Ruth Friendly

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NOTE: The full program is available to press for viewing through the Press Room at www.mindsontheedge.org Contact Colby Kelly for access.