Physician Relishes Cameo Roles

The Rest of Your Life

Physician Depression, Suicide Risks Addressed by New Film

By Greg Muirhead

Contributing Writer

Kula, Hawaii — U.S. physicians have among the highest suicide rates of any occupation in this country, and a 1-hour documentary has been made to illustrate the manner, Dr. Paula Clayton reported.

The hope is that the documentary, "Struggling in Silence: Physician Depres-
sion and Suicide," will foster a change in the practice and culture of medicine so that physicians begin to feel free to seek psychiatric help when they need it, Dr. Clayton, medical director of the American Foundation for Suicidal Prevention (AFSP), said at the annual meeting of the American College of Psychiatrists.

According to a clip from the film shown at the meeting, 300-400 physicians commit suicide each year. The clip showed interviews with a medical student in San Diego, a surgeon from Arkansas, and a physician at Massachusetts General Hospital. The first two described their struggles with depression, and in the third, the physician discussed her difficulties in dealing with bipolar disorder. The film also includes interviews with two spouses who were survivors of husband physicians who committed suicide, Dr. Clayton said.

The film is scheduled to begin aired on PBS stations in May. In addition, a set of slides related to the topic of the film will be available over the next few months for use at medical schools, in residency programs, and at hospitals, according to Dr. Clayton.

From the larger film, a 13-minute short about the medical student also has been under development. "We lose about an entire medical school class a year—of physicians—to suicide every year," Dr. Clayton said.

"Struggling in Silence," created by AFSP, was partly funded by the American College of Physicians, Wyeth Pharmaceuticals, and proceeds from a fundraising walk held in Boston, she said."