

Sean




Our son Sean passed away at 19 years old this January to suicide. His passing was as sudden as it was surprising. Sean was a quiet, compassionate, well loved, brilliant

young man who was attending an honors program for his freshman year in college. It is our hope that our tragic story hopefully can be used to inform parents and young people of the risk of depression and suicide. Our story is similar to many whose family members have been struck down by suicide. We discovered after his death that our son became depressed and reached out to the counseling center at the university in

the days leading up to his death. The counseling center recommended that he go see a different department (department of health services) to seek an appointment with a psychiatrist for antidepressant medicine. This course of action did not address his current dire condition. He set an appointment with a psychiatrist the following week but never made it to the appointment due to his dire condition. His friends quickly noticed his absence the next day and contacted campus security, who discovered his body. It was a horrible visit received from the local police and Chaplin. In the weeks and months following his death we have assembled facts that help us understand how and why this had happened.

The adolescent brain is still developing at a rapid pace until age 25. At times it may not be equipped to handle the emotional challenges that face these young adults by moving away and going out on their own for the first time. Neuropsychologists tell us that this period of life is marked by an unstable sense of self and unstable moods; despite how well an adolescent may appear academically or socially.



When a young adult travels to attend college hundreds or thousands of miles away from home, they are suddenly drawn away from a support system which has been well attuned to their needs and idiosyncrasies; friends, family, teachers, and neighbors who know them well and care deeply for them. At College, they are very dependent on the quality of their newly forming relationships, and the adequacy of the medical system on their local community or at the University. When they suffer, they are farther from the people that know them the best and dependent on the judgment of the people that know them the least.

We as parents were not informed of Sean's dire condition due to University privacy laws. This law makes sense for fully functioning adults near their support systems. It makes less sense for newly christened adults still in the throes of adolescence, living far away from home. It is our hope that parents become educated to their rights at counseling centers before they send their child to college so that a family system is in place in case their child becomes depressed and possibly suicidal. One in four to five children that go to college as freshman suffer from depression sometime during their college experience. It is important for parents to know their children's vulnerabilities and their rights prior to sending their child to college. Our family is tormented by not knowing the signs we should have seen in our son. The university counseling center had the information because our son opened up to them for help, he did the right thing, but he didn't know the seriousness of his disease and his increased vulnerability due to his age. If a student was experiencing a life threatening physical medical condition, would this be the course of action? Why did our son choose to open up to a counseling center and not to his parents of which he was very close to? We will never know because we did not get that opportunity. Should the law be changed for a parent to have that opportunity? We hope through changes in the law that future parents will have that opportunity when their children are at the greatest risk for depression. It is our view that changes need to happen and it is our hope that they will happen.