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## APA Urges Media to Stop Airing Graphic Cho Materials

**Arlington, Va.** – Today the American Psychiatric Association (APA) sent an open letter to the news media urging them to stop airing the disturbing writings, photographs and video that NBC News reportedly received from Cho Seung-Hui, who committed suicide after murdering 32 students and faculty and wounding at least 29 others at Virginia Tech.

The letter was signed by APA President Pedro Ruiz, M.D., and contained two enclosures: a World Health Organization report, entitled “[Preventing Suicide: A Resource for Media Professionals](#),” and a study from American Behavioral Scientist, entitled “[Media Contagion and Suicide among the Young](#)” and authored by Madelyn Gould, Ph.D., of Columbia University and colleagues. The full text of the letter is as follows:

On behalf of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and our 38,000 physician members specializing in the diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses, I urge all news media outlets to stop airing the disturbing writings, photographs and video that NBC News reportedly received from Cho Seung-Hui, who committed suicide after murdering 32 students and faculty and wounding at least 29 others at Virginia Tech.

The publicity of the Cho materials not only seems insensitive to the grieving and traumatized families, friends and peers of those murdered and injured, but also seriously jeopardizes the public’s safety by potentially inciting “copycat” suicides, homicides and other incidents. Because the scientific evidence in this area is clear, the World Health Organization, in its 2000 report “Preventing Suicide: A Resource for Media Professionals,” said: “Glorifying suicide victims as martyrs and objects of public adulation may suggest to susceptible persons that their society honours suicidal behaviour.” Indeed, it is evident to many that the Columbine tragedy was a powerful force in Mr. Cho’s writings. The media have an important role to play in limiting the power of such tragedies by choosing not to sensationalize them.

Some media have declined to publicize Mr. Cho’s materials – a decision we applaud. However, some outlets, including NBC News, continue to use the materials. NBC News issued a statement yesterday in which it announced that, after thorough review, it has “limited our usage of the video across NBC News, including MSNBC, to no more than 10 percent of our airtime.” While we trust this action was undertaken with the best of intentions, allowing the Cho materials to continue to constitute 10 percent of airtime demonstrates a lack of understanding of the potential impact the video and audio could have.

The massacre at Virginia Tech is newsworthy and it is the media’s job to report on it, but we believe the media have a responsibility to balance the public’s need to know against the potential danger of provoking copycat behavior. The APA urges, for the public good, that all media cease airing the graphic Cho materials.

**About the American Psychiatric Association:**

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society whose more than 38,000 physician members specialize in diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses including substance use disorders. Visit the APA at [www.psych.org](http://www.psych.org) and [www.HealthyMinds.org](http://www.HealthyMinds.org).

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