

## Press Release

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Date: April 19, 2010

### ONS Foundation rolls out **ThinkFirst** Program in Area Schools

STAMFORD, CT – Friday morning, April 9th, the auditorium at Stamford High School was humming with morning chatter as over 350 students in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades slid into their seats. Conversations quickly faded when Dr. Scott Simon, clad in a white lab coat, approached the lectern and introduced himself. The neurosurgeon was there on behalf of the ONS Foundation for Clinical Research and Education and ThinkFirst, a non-profit Injury Prevention Foundation, which has chapters all over the world. ThinkFirst is dedicated to preventing brain, spinal cord and other traumatic injuries through the education of individuals, community leaders and the creators of public policy. The ThinkFirst Chapter at the ONS Foundation is one of four Chapters in New York and Connecticut and the only one serving Fairfield County.

“Brain and spinal cord injuries are the leading cause of death and disability in young people between 15 and 24 years of age,” said Simon. “Many of these injuries are preventable!” To get this message across, he is addressing student groups, using compelling facts about what happens to the spine and brain as a result of different injuries and accidents, along with live testimony from patients who have experienced life-changing injuries.

With him on Friday was Diana Silonova, who on January 14, 2009, sustained a catastrophic spinal cord injury in a car accident that occurred just before her 29<sup>th</sup> birthday. She is paralyzed from her chest down. “I was on top of the world,” said Diana. “In school, I was an accomplished athlete on my national soccer team in Slovakia. I had been a very successful student, had a great job and traveled all over the world. One day, I left work in a hurry. I started my car and took off without putting on my seatbelt. All of a sudden I swerved and hit a tree.”

Diana suffered a C4 complete injury, which she explained makes it impossible to feel or move her body below the chest. She urged students to take the time to put on a seatbelt, every time they get into a car. If she had, her life would be different.

In Spring of 2007, 14 year-old Jazmyne Lester of Dulles, VA was visiting her grandmother in Greenwich when she was struck by a car as she walked across the road. She suffered an acute subdural hematoma and malignant brain swelling, causing the brain to be pushed into the brain stem. Dr. Simon performed an emergency hemicraniectomy to remove a large section of Jazmyne's skull to access the hematoma. Once the swelling subsided, the skull section was reattached. Although clinically recovered, Jazmyne continues to suffer the effects of her injury, which include fatigue and memory loss. She has come to terms with having to revise her college plans from applying to Harvard to finding a school with less demanding environment.

The goal of the ThinkFirst program is to help people develop lifelong safety habits to minimize the risk of sustaining traumatic injuries. In Dr. Simon's program, he focuses on underlying behaviors that lead to injury and exploring issues such as peer pressure, risk taking, conflict resolution, and substance abuse, particularly as they relate to violence, motor vehicle safety, and sports/recreation safety. "Acting on impulses can be risky. There are consequences to your actions," he summarized. "Sometimes they are serious, so think before you act." In the coming months Dr. Simon will address students at The Academy of Information Technology & Engineering in Stamford, North Street School in Greenwich and groups organized by the Greenwich Red Cross.

**ThinkFirst** is a non-profit National Injury Prevention Foundation dedicated to preventing brain, spinal cord and other traumatic injuries through the education of individuals, community leaders and the creators of public policy. Formally known as the National Head and Spinal Cord Injury Prevention Program, it was first implemented nationally in 1986.

**THINKFIRST ONS FOUNDATION** is a chapter of the ThinkFirst National Injury Prevention Foundation. The role of local chapters is to work with teachers, educators and communities to reduce the risk of brain and spinal cord injury through education and community outreach. Each locally established program is sponsored by a neurosurgeon committed to public education and injury prevention. ThinkFirst ONS Foundation is sponsored by **Scott Simon, MD, MPH** of the ONS Foundation.

**ONS Foundation for Clinical Research and Education, Inc.** is a registered not-for-profit, 501(c)3 organization devoted to understanding the causes and optimal treatments of orthopedic injuries and musculoskeletal conditions. The ONS Foundation, in alliance with Greenwich Hospital, strives to improve standards of excellence for the treatment of musculoskeletal disorders through clinical research, physician and patient education, and community outreach programs. The Foundation sponsors injury prevention and other seminars throughout the year. The office is located at 6 Greenwich Office Park, 10 Valley Drive, Greenwich, CT. For further information about the ONS Foundation, visit [www.ons-foundation.org](http://www.ons-foundation.org) or call (203) 869-3131.

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