

Testimony of Gentiva Health Services

To the Human Services Committee

Regarding HB 5664

An Act Concerning Payment to Home Health Care Agencies and Homemaker-Home Health Aide Agencies

Thursday, February 8, 2007

Senator Harris, Representative Villano, and members of the Human Services committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of Gentiva Health Services in support of House Bill No. 5664.

Gentiva Health Services provides homecare services to a large number of patients who suffer from serious and persistent mental illness. These patients are some of the most compromised and isolated individuals in our respective communities.

Over recent years the complexity of both the mental health and medical conditions that our patients endure has increased greatly. Current Dept. of Social Services regulations do not fully recognize this complexity and current reimbursement rates do not reflect the complicated and time-consuming psychosocial and medical problems that our clinicians encounter as they care for their patients on a daily basis. Gentiva Health Services has had the privilege of collaborating with our colleagues in the homecare industry to propose legislation that will redress this situation. I seek your support for this legislation for the following reasons:

Prevalence of Serious Co morbid Medical Conditions in our Patients:

This is an issue that has received much attention in recent psychiatric and medical publications. In preparation for a recent staff in-service I conducted a survey of eighty medical records of patients in one of our branch offices. The results of this survey are summarized in the table attached to my testimony but here are some of the findings that demonstrate the level of compromised health in our patients:

- 64 (79%) patients had one or more medical diagnosis.
- 28 (43%) patients were taking five or more medical medications
- 36 (45%) patients were taking five or more psychiatric medications
- 22 (27%) patients were taking a total of 10 or more medications

Psychiatric Issues:

As with the medical issues we encounter in our patients the psychiatric issues have also become more complicated. An over-stretched mental health system, decreased number of psychiatric hospital beds and decreased length of hospital stay have all helped to increase the burden of psychiatric symptoms that our patients carry.

Health System:

Unfortunately our healthcare system is not designed to ensure that psychiatric patients receive appropriate primary medical care. Very often it is the homecare nurse that is first to recognize and initiate treatment for serious medical conditions in our patients. The management of these

conditions entails communication and collaboration across a wide range of professional clinicians, specialties and settings.

Behavioral health homecare is complicated work carried out in a complex and fragmented setting with much compromised patients by highly dedicated, educated and professional behavioral health homecare specialists.

I respectfully request that you support HB 5664 so that the work of the homecare agencies and clinicians providing these services can be appropriately recognized in our reimbursement system, and that some of the most compromised, isolated and marginalized citizens of our state can continue to receive the highest quality healthcare possible.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you.

Medical Co-morbidities in a Random Sample of Behavioral Health Homecare Patients

For the purposes of this survey a random sample of eighty records of patients receiving behavioral health homecare services at one Gentiva Health Services office was chosen. Each record was reviewed to ascertain the number of patients who were:

- diagnosed with one or more medical conditions in addition to their psychiatric diagnosis(es)
- the number of medical medications the patient's were taking and
- the number of psychiatric medications the patient's were taking.

The findings of this survey are outlined in the table below.

Number of Patients with a Medical Diagnosis		Number of Patients taking Medical Medications		Number of Patients taking Psychiatric Medications	
No. of Medical Diagnoses	No. of Patients (%)	No. of Medical Medications	No. of Patients (%)	No. of Psychiatric Medications	No. of Patients (%)
0	16 (20%)	0	2 (3%)	0	0
1	29 (36%)	1	12 (19%)	1	0
2	18 (23%)	2	10 (16%)	2	6 (7%)
3	17 (21%)	3	5 (8%)	3	19 (24%)
		4	7 (11%)	4	20 (25%)
		5	8 (12%)	5	24 (30%)
		>5	20 (31%)	>5	12 (15%)

- 64 (80%) patients had one or more medical diagnosis.
- 28 (43%) patients were taking five or more medical medications
- 36 (45%) patients were taking five or more psychiatric medications
- 22 (27%) patients were taking a total of 10 or more medications

The most common medical conditions found were Diabetes, Asthma, Congestive Heart Failure, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, Gastro-esophageal Reflux Disease, Hypertension, and other endocrine conditions such as hypothyroidism.

Proposed Language

HB 5664

The commissioner of social services shall not construe a visit as limited to the administration of medication when the patient has one or more active medical conditions requiring the attention of a nurse and/or has a diagnosis of a serious and persistent mental illness which requires the interventions of a skilled mental health nurse. Such interventions may include but shall not be limited to psychoeducation, cognitive behavioral therapy and the teaching of symptom management techniques such as the management of delusions and hallucinations.