



THE CONNECTICUT PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION, INC.

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March 18, 2013

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Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson and Members of the Public Health Committee;

We are Barbara Ward-Zimmerman, Chairperson of the Healthcare Reform Task Force and Barbara S. Bunk, President of the Connecticut Psychological Association and psychologist in private practice in Glastonbury. We are writing to urge your **support of *RB 1069 An Act Concerning The Joint Practice of Physicians and Psychologists.***

This bill addresses the corporate statutes for medical practice, which were designed many years ago in a different era of healthcare. Across the nation, these laws were intended to protect patients by preventing physicians from incorporating with others; the belief was that only physicians should make clinical decisions, and that non-physician input would put patients at risk by potentially placing the interest of the corporation above the interest of the patient. Over time, the accruing evidence toward 'whole-person care' has eroded the philosophy that the physician alone is responsible for patient care. Indeed, the Affordable Care Act directs that healthcare become integrated, identifying that patients are served well by a team of healthcare professionals. As healthcare reform and integration of services have become more commonplace, corporate practice of medicine statutes are clearly antiquated. Passage of this bill will assist the State in efforts to integrate healthcare for Connecticut's citizens. The bill will allow psychologists to join professional service corporations with physicians, to establish integrated practices that provide both mental health and medical services.

In a recent review by the American Psychological Association Practice Office of Legal & Regulatory Affairs it was concluded that just over half of the states allow psychologists to broadly incorporate with other health care professionals. Of course, joining practices is just one new model of delivery of healthcare services that has arisen during this time of national healthcare reform, and is entirely voluntary. Passage of RB 1069 will simply enable psychologists and physicians in Connecticut to take advantage of joint practice if they choose.

Psychologists can and do help promote health through primary care. There is no doubt that psychological health and physical health are inextricably interrelated. Research shows, for example, that depression is among the top 10 conditions driving medical costs (2009 Almanac of Chronic Disease); and that stress plays a significant role in 75% of patients' visits to primary care physicians (PCPs). (Retrieved from <http://www.upstate.edu/stress/work.php>.) Yet, approximately 50% of those referred for mental health treatment made by a PCP do not make a first appointment (Fisher & Ransom, 1997; Hoge, Auchterlonie & Milliken, 2006).



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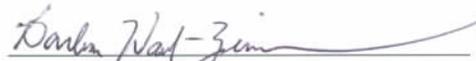
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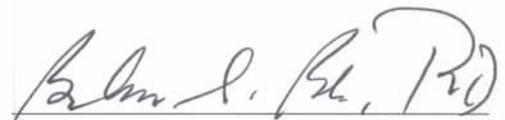
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Through initiation of efficient behavioral health screening programs promoting early identification, collaborative treatment planning, implementation of evidence-based services, and the facilitation of timely and targeted specialty referrals when needed, psychologists can work jointly with primary care providers to assist in the promotion of health at every stage of development. Prevention services, treatment across the life span, and evaluation of outcomes are essential components of the new healthcare environment, and are an integral part of the doctoral level psychologist's training. Psychologists have been proven to be an asset to the new healthcare environment. For example, demonstration programs across the nation have revealed that the routine inclusion of psychologists in the delivery of medical care is leading to the outcomes of better overall health and the reduction of costly procedures and hospitalizations that result from avoidable complications (e.g., Collins et al., 2010).

In addition, psychologists enhance the successful management of chronic conditions, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and mental illnesses by facilitating the adherence to medical treatment. Psychological interventions promote positive behavior changes in patient compliance with treatment and motivation for healthy living. Evidence-based practices have been shown to improve patient outcomes by increasing the use of adaptive coping skills, establishing healthy eating practices, engaging in routine exercise, and resisting substance abuse. As we know that 80% of the work in primary care focuses on prevention and chronic disease management (DeGruy, 2013), it is clear that joint practice between physicians and psychologists will improve patient care.

In sum, the integration of behavioral health and primary care affords citizens of Connecticut better access, better care, better value, and most significantly, better health. Allowing psychologists to form professional corporations with other healthcare professionals will facilitate the practice of integrating care.


Barbara Ward-Zimmerman, Ph.D.


Barbara S. Bunk, Ph.D.

References:

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