



Comprehensive Psychiatric Care, P.C.

200 W Town St
Norwich, CT
06360

205 Old Boston Post Rd
Old Saybrook, CT
06475

March 14, 2021

Dear Members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Sharif Okasha, and I am a clinical psychologist working at an outpatient group practice in Norwich and Old Saybrook, CT. My role is both clinical and administrative, and we have been supporting patients throughout the pandemic through telehealth. We have seen a substantial increase in service need and service delivery throughout the pandemic. Without telehealth services, thousands of patients would have gone without their needed care.

During the COVID19 health emergency, telehealth became crucial for psychologists to deliver mental and behavioral health services. Telehealth allowed patients to seamlessly continue their therapy despite quarantine restrictions. Additionally, telehealth, including phone-only service delivery, increased accessibility to services. Our group was able to increase available patient hours due to flexibility of telehealth. Patients too, had greater flexibility without having to leave their house or manage work hours and child care restrictions.

Parity of payment for telehealth is a particularly critical component of this bill. Not only is parity the right thing to do, parity of payment will allow providers to sustainably provide this service delivery option. Without payment parity, access to mental and behavioral health services will decrease. Without payment parity, our group, Comprehensive Psychiatric Care, would no longer be able to offer telehealth services regularly due to financial limitations.

Our group has 4 full time MD and APRN level providers as well as 10 doctoral and masters level clinicians. We serve over 1000 patients monthly and we take all major health insurances as well as medicare and HUSKY. Providing ongoing telehealth services in addition to traditional face-to-face services is essential to increasing access to services. Audio-only telehealth services is another critical component of this bill and directly connects with access to our most vulnerable patients. Audio-only has been essential for patients without access to consistent and private internet services, financial hardship, complex social and environmental factors; as well as, during unexpected disruptions to visual and audio connections.

Research and training for telehealth service delivery has demonstrated it is safe and effective. Psychologists have been delivering therapeutic services via telehealth within the Department of Defense, as well as in most states, for at least 10 years. The COVID19 pandemic simply expanded the use of telehealth abruptly for all psychologists across the country, simultaneously. As a member of Connecticut Psychological Association, I was able to receive immediate training on providing telehealth psychological services, with expert telehealth psychologists.

Telehealth service delivery is one additional part to the complex healthcare puzzle, will provide some relief for the access problem, and will help more people.

I urge your support of SB 1022/ HB 5596 An Act Concerning Telehealth.

Respectfully, Sharif Okaha, Psy.D.
Comprehensive Psychiatric Care
860-886-1508
sokasha@cpccare.com