



3-25-20

Dear Governor,

Scientists and lay persons alike agree- the mental health needs of our country are unmet and we are in a state of crisis. Now, with the enormous additional stress of COVID-19, this is all the more evident.

The situation is urgent!

As Executive Director of the American Board of Medical Psychology (www.amphome.org), and with full support of our sister affiliate, the National Alliance of Professional Psychology Providers (www.NAPPP.org), I want to respectfully present to you three important and scientifically validated steps you could take right now to immediately and positively impact the mental health and subsequently, the physical health, of your constituents.

1) Mandatory staffing of doctoral-level psychologists (one psychologist to every four physicians) in all healthcare facilities that accept government insurance, specifically, hospitals, primary care centers, residential care facilities, nursing homes, substance abuse programs, etc. This would ensure more integrated care. All top scientists and health care organizations understand and advocate for a biopsychosocial conceptualization of patients, and that health care is best delivered when mental and behavioral health aspects of the patient are addressed. Psychologists do psychological assessments and testing for accurate diagnoses, and formulate sophisticated and comprehensive psychological and behavioral treatment plans for long-term, lasting change, as opposed to the archaic, but still prevalent practice of using palliative "medication-only" approaches.

2) As has been afforded other doctors of healthcare, grants to financially support all doctoral level psychologists and their practice toward full telehealth integration. COVID-19 has forced dramatic changes for practitioners and many will not be able to survive financially with these added costs. All facilities and private practices where psychologists are employed should have access to grants.

3) Approve of properly trained psychologists (at the post doctorate level) to add psychopharmacological interventions and prescriptive authority to their scope of practice. While not an adequate treatment plan by itself, psychotropic medications can be a helpful technique for some people at certain times in the course of their treatment. You should know that several states and all of the military branches have active prescribing psychologists, serving hundreds of thousands of patients with the greatest safety rating and lowest unit costs of any prescribing specialty as exemplified by research based “medical cost offset publications. Medical Psychologists have extensive required post doctoral training including anatomy and physiology, histology, biochemistry, general health assessment, pharmacology, psychopharmacology, and special population’s courses. Additionally, they must complete a prescribing and diagnosing and treating Preceptorship or Residency under a prescriber who is a Medical Psychologist, physician, or nurse practitioner before being allowed to sit for a national oral examination and a national written examination. (see www.amphome.org).

The Medical Psychologist and the Psychopharmacologist are among the most trained and specialized psychologists and practitioners in the mental health disciplines. These specialty psychologists provide coverage with specialized diagnosis, psychotherapy, and medication selection and management and monitoring that cannot be provided by other mental health disciplines that are poorly dispersed, available, and distributed. To deprive the public and facilities of these doctors out of tradition or guild opposition harms the public, stops market forces and competition which help drive down healthcare costs and stabilize recruitment barriers in rural and underserved areas.

I share your concern for the vulnerable in our nation and the breathtaking impact and havoc associated with untreated mental illness. I urge you to take these three steps immediately.

Please feel free to contact me. AMP would be pleased to serve in any capacity.

Sincerely and with warmest regards,

Dr. Lawson

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