

Merrilee Johnson Testimony before House Health  
Care Committee, April 12, 2013

House Bill 2353

Chair Greenlick and members of the House Health Care Committee,

My Name is Merrilee Johnson. I am a pharmacist, the mother of two adult sons, and have been a client of talk therapy off and on for several years.

As a client of talk therapy, I have concerns about the future availability unless the reimbursement rate for non-medical health care provider issue is addressed.

Since the reimbursement rate was reduced seemingly arbitrarily a few years ago, it seems to me as a consumer that talk-therapy providers will be harder to find as time goes on. As in any other business, health-care related or not, if reimbursement rates go down, either prices go up or services are curtailed. Assuming some providers would choose to retire or go to work for institutions, others would go out of network. For me as a consumer, that means my co-pay would go up substantially. A lot of people would not be able to pay this large increase, and treatment would be less available.

With non-medical health care providers especially, their office staff is crucial to the success of the mental health of the client. As a client, getting a personal greeting and smile when I walk through the door means a lot.

For most of my adult life, I have been on antidepressant medications, and while they help, talk therapy has been invaluable to me to deal with my emotional struggles, helped me be a better person and made it easier to deal with the challenges of my career. I am better able to get up and go to work each day, knowing that I will have the chance to participate in talk therapy and have a safe place to go to talk about how I am feeling, what is bothering me, and to deal with my real and self-inflicted low self-esteem.

Through dealing with my frustration over my oldest son's difficulties in grade school, my talk therapist suggested I have some testing done. With the help of my therapist and family physician, he was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder. With appropriate medication, he lost his label of being 'slow' and graduated from high school with honors and from Oregon State University with a degree in Mechanical Engineering. Without the help and support of my therapist, I'm quite sure there would have been a lesser outcome. When in college, my son needed testing by a psychiatrist or psychologist to be able to take advantage of the Americans with Disabilities Act to aid in taking exams. We called many offices for an appointment, and the wait time was several months. A client in need of acute treatment would not be able to wait that long and continue functioning without being a burden on the medical community, whereas a talk therapist could help quickly.

In conclusion, I support House Bill 2353 as a forward move to mental health parity, in that it asks for dialog with insurance companies and allows them to report to the Director of Department of Consumer and Business Services the methods used to determine reimbursement.

Sincerely,  
Merrilee Johnson