



OREGON PSYCHIATRIC PHYSICIANS ASSOCIATION

Date: April 5, 2017

To: The Honorable Mitch Greenlick, Chair
The Honorable Rob Nosse, Vice-Chair
The Honorable Cedric Hayden, Vice-Chair
Members of the House Health Care Committee

From: Jon Betlinski, M.D. President-Elect
Oregon Psychiatric Physicians Association

RE: Position statement on HB 3355, psychologist prescribing authority

Chair Greenlick and members of the House Health Care Committee:

My name is Dr. Jon Betlinski and I'm the President Elect of the Oregon Psychiatric Physicians Association. OPPA, a district branch of the American Psychiatric Association, was established in 1966 and serves as the organization for psychiatrists in Oregon working together to ensure humane care and effective treatment for persons with mental illness, including substance use disorders, and compassion for their families.

OPPA opposes HB 3355, which would allow for psychologists to prescribe drugs in the medical setting. Passage of the bill as written, would put patients at risk, allowing people with inadequate medical training to dispense powerful psychotropic medications to some of Oregon's most vulnerable patients.

HB 3355 would create a new category of practitioners — the prescribing psychologist— but by definition it would also create a new category of patient; the patient who can be prescribed drugs by a professional with minimal medical training. We risk further stigmatization of patients with mental illness by making them the only patients who will receive medical treatment by practitioners who have not been trained in the complex ways in which the body functions. And yet, most psychiatric medications have serious side effects and risks, even risks that can lead to death and permanent disability.

No practitioner should be allowed to prescribe drugs unless they have met all of the educational and clinical training requirements of other non-physician medical professions

that currently have the authority to write prescriptions, such as physician assistants and nurse practitioners.

This bill doesn't expand access — there already are mental health prescribers in the medical setting — but it masks the real problem; not all patients in the mental health arena have access to appropriate care and the legislature is right to address that issue.

How can access be improved?

Current practice trends such as telemedicine, and especially coordinated care organizations, are already in place and increasing in number. These will provide regular access to psychiatric expertise to primary care clinics without sacrificing a deep general medical understanding of the patient.

OPAL-K, a psychiatric access line, provides free, same-day child psychiatric phone consultation to primary care providers in Oregon. Funding should be considered by the Oregon Legislature for an OPAL-A program for adults.

Funding a new program in Oregon to train physician assistants in psychiatric prescribing also extends access without sacrificing basic medical understanding.

The AIMS Center based out of the University of Washington has developed a program to expand primary care to include behavioral health treatment from psychiatrists efficiently and effectively. Multiple studies show evidence of improved patient care, improved outcomes with decreased cost.

The Oregon Psychiatric Physicians Association and partners have led or participated in, implementation of effective initiatives such as OPAL-K, telemedicine, CCOs, the Collaborative Care model, Physician Assistant training programs and supported other practice trends that increase access to mental health practitioners such as MDs, NPs, PAs and to mental health professionals, who can provide evidence-based psychotherapies that can be as effective as medications.

We urge legislators to pursue strategies that have been proven to increase access to mental health care. OPPA is eager to support and assist in the implementation of these strategies.

If the legislature decides to go forward with HB 3355, the OPPA respectfully asks to be part of the effort to carefully develop amendments establishing basic patient-safety protections (including appropriate regulatory oversight) for Oregon's mental health patients that are on par with the protections every other Oregonian has in the medical setting.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'd be pleased to answer any questions.