

WMHCA

Wisconsin Mental Health Counselors Association

Summer / Fall 2007

Legislative Update

Since the last WMHCA newsletter there have continued to be issues needing attention. The two main issues are the proposed Clinic Rules and Assembly Bill 463.

With regard to the Clinic Rules; The Wisconsin Coalition of Behavioral Health Providers FKA Wisc. Coalition of Social Workers, Marriage/Family Therapists and Professional Counselors, continues to work with the Department of Health and Family Services to get a draft together that will be acceptable to all.

The last coalition meeting was held on July 27, 2007 which I attended, representing WMHCA. This has been a long and very arduous process and will not see the light of day before January 2008. The rules are going to get one more "rewrite" which will include suggestions gathered from the public hearings held during 2006/2007. Joyce Allen and Dan Zimmerman are the two key players for the state. We have worked with them for the past couple of years and they truly are trying to make this process as painless as possible.

Some changes which are to be addressed: use of the term Mental Health Practitioner, One Person clinics, Variances, Training License.

While it seems as if this proposed Rule change is taking forever, I feel that we are in the Home Stretch and by early 2008 it should be in place. If you are not familiar with the proposed Rules feel free to contact me and I will make sure that you get a copy of the draft.

The next issue is Assembly Bill 463 which has been proposed by the social workers/NASW. The focus of this bill is the elimination of outpatient clinics which NASW has deemed unnecessary since we hold a license in either Social Work, Marriage/Family Therapy or Professional Counseling. The bill was introduced July 19, 2007. The bill would also seek to change the Medical Assistance (MA) program which requires that one be in a certified clinic if they are going to be compensated through Medicaid and Medicare.

While this is an issue that the Coalition has discussed numerous times we were not able to support the bill at this time as there are stumbling blocks which need to be resolved. This is not to say that we could not in the future be supportive but this is going to likely be a much tougher piece of legislation to get passed. It is best to work on one issue at a time

However as we all know, the social workers are a very organized group and they carry much political clout. Ann Jablonski, our Lobbyist, did attend the NASW meeting on August 3, 2007. Her comments will follow.

The following comment was expressed at the Coalition meeting "with counties closing many of the mental health facilities, the need for Clinics will Rise.

Another comment "while the Vendorship bill may take care of some issues, Insurance companies may still require Clinics." Good news from AMHCA, on August 1, 2007 the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation to establish coverage of state-licensed mental health counselors under Medicare. Under the bill, state-licensed mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists would be able to bill Medicare for providing outpatient mental health services at the same rate as clinical social workers. If signed by the President it would take effect January 1, 2008. This is great news and we need to send a big Thank You to Beth Powell at AMHCA.

Please contact me with any questions or concerns.

Deborah Lau Schingen