

## TESTIMONY

Regarding House Bill 95  
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May 20, 2003

Good Afternoon

I am Dr. Alice Randolph, president of the Ohio Psychological Association, which has 1800 member psychologists. I am also CEO of a geriatric psychology practice that serves residents in over 200 elder care facilities in Ohio.

I am requesting that the Senate act **to protect psychology services** to Ohio citizens who depend on Medicaid for their health care. Governor Taft has recommended in his budget proposal that Medicaid stop funding psychology services. The elimination of psychological services will have an impact on all recipients, and as a geriatric psychologist I'd like to specifically discuss the elderly. **Denying psychological services to the elderly not only has the potential to prolong and worsen human suffering that is treatable, it will also place financial burdens on other aspects of the Ohio health care system and in effect will cost money rather than save money.**

Psychological services are a critical component of overall health care. There are numerous studies establishing that depression and anxiety are critical factors in recovery from surgeries, heart attacks, cancer and strokes. Emotional problems are often barriers to compliance with diet, therapy, dialysis, and medication regimes. The integration of mind and body has been well established and treating some of an individual's health problems such as coronary disease or diabetes while totally eliminating treatment of other problems such as depression or anxiety is not effective health care.

For example, last month we treated a 72 year old woman who while living at home fell and broke her hip. When placed in a nursing home for recuperation she stopped eating and doing physical therapy. The psychologist determined that she was depressed because she was terrified of losing her independence. With just 3 sessions she had resolved her fears, was beginning to walk in physical therapy and plans were in place for her discharge back to her home. If the depression were not treated she may have become a permanent nursing home resident or may have been sent to the emergency room due to dehydration or malnutrition.

Psychological services are particularly important to our elderly citizens because they are often faced with so many issues at the same time. We see stressors such as failing health, financial worries, the death of friends and family members, (sometimes even their own children), the trauma of giving up their homes and moving into a care facility, and dealing with their own war experiences that have been revived by our current climate of terrorism and war. Even the most resilient can be worn down and sometimes need help coping.

The needs of the elderly are highlighted in a May 19, 2003 article from the Plain Dealer that describes the health care bias against seniors due in part to a lack of health professionals trained in geriatrics. People over 65 suffer the highest suicide rate in the nation. In March of this year the HHS Inspector General issued a finding that the psychosocial needs of nursing home residents are significantly not being met. Eliminating psychological services will make a bad situation worse.

You may hear some proponents of this budget argue that it does not eliminate medical care, therefore psychiatrists can provide behavioral health services. However there is a shortage of psychiatrists who will go to nursing homes. Many nursing homes and primary care physicians rely on the interventions and consultations of psychologists for the behavioral health needs of the residents. Even if psychiatrists would be able to fill some of the void left by the elimination of psychologists, the rate of reimbursement for the same services is higher. The effect would again be less service at a higher cost.

Many elderly Ohio citizens rely on Medicaid for their health care. Psychological services are a necessary component of that health care and we respectfully urge the members of this committee to protect these services.