Introduction

Welcome to the Texas Psychological Association’s (TPA) quarterly report. The information contained within is intended to provide a brief snapshot of the advocacy efforts conducted by TPA during each three-month period.

Regulatory Advocacy

Behavioral Health Executive Council

In October we shared big news with you regarding your licensure fees. TPA Executive Director Jessica Magee has been participating on the Behavioral Health Executive Council (BHEC) Subcommittee on Licensure Fees in an effort to advocate for reduced licensure fees. Now that licensees are under one roof, psychologists should not be footing the bill for the agency.

The Subcommittee has voted to recommend a proposal to BHEC that would reduce licensure fees to 75% of the national average or maintain current fees, whichever is lower. For psychologists, this is significantly lower! The LP Application and License Issuance will drop from $826 to $204. The cost for LP Renewal will drop from $412 to $285.

Won’t this impact the quality of service I receive from BHEC? No. Currently, licensed mental health professionals are significantly overpaying licensure fees, resulting in a return of millions to the state’s general revenue budget. Because your fees are not dedicated, BHEC is prohibited from retaining the excess generated and improving the quality of services it provides.

The proposed fee reduction by the Subcommittee more closely mimics the cost of what it takes to run BHEC and still provides a moderate cushion to protect against rapid changes in the mental health workforce.

The work isn’t quite done yet. The proposal must still be approved by BHEC, submitted to the Legislative Budget Board (the body that oversees the state’s budget), then implemented once and if approved. But we are hopeful to see changes soon.

BHEC’s Rules Standardization Committee has been meeting roughly monthly. TPA Director of Professional Affairs Dr. Brian Stagner serves on this subcommittee. The goal is to help streamline BHEC’s administrative burden by consolidating regulations in areas where the different constituent boards have different rules. For Q4, the committee focused on supervision rules. The different boards seem to have different ways of counting or calculating supervision hours. These differences don’t reflect substantive differences, but they cause headaches for the staff that oversees them.

A second issue is how to count CE. Each board has different CE/PD requirements. One board automatically gives one PD credit for taking their jurisprudence exam. In that group, licensees have to take the exam every year. Some groups count PD every year, some do it every two years. We have worked on changes that BHEC might recommend to the constituent boards that would be more uniform, but progress is slow.

The BHEC Workforce Study Workgroup met in December to outline goals for its study. Mrs. Magee also participates on this workgroup. A survey draft had already been prepared by staff and volunteers. The survey questions were recently reviewed by Dr. Corinne Zupanick, who sits on the TSBEP/BHEC Monitoring Committee. The next meeting, likely to finalize edits, will
occur in February. Expect to see the survey sent to all licensees later this year. The first of its kind, we anticipate the results being used for years to come to drive decisions at the legislature.

Also this quarter, BHEC published a new set of proposed rule changes in the December 10th edition of the *Texas Register*. They relate to employee sick-leave programs, license statuses, and special licensing provisions. TPA Lobbyist Kevin Stewart and the TSBEP/BHEC Monitoring Committee reviewed the proposal and determined TPA did not need to take action on these. TPA Members are provided explanation of proposed rules the following week they appear in the *Register*.

**Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists**

In November, TPA defeated a proposed rule by the Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists (TSBEP) that, in part, would have allowed for waivers to internship requirements on a case-by-case basis, as well as allow for other supervisory modifications.

TPA leadership is currently working with TSBEP and legislators to determine if there are any alternative ways to address application deficiencies through remediation that do not lessen standards for licensure.

This quarter we also saw the appointments of Drs. Roxana Lambdin and Mark Cartwright to TSBEP. They fill the seats of Drs. Susan Fletcher and Ron Palomares. Dr. Cartwright is a current member of TPA.

(BHEC/TSBEP Committee Members: Drs. Carol Grothues and Bret Moore, Co-Chairs; Fran Douglas; David Hill; Dan Roberts, and Corrine Zupanick; and Brian Stagner as Director of Professional Affairs).

**Texas Health and Human Services**

We continue to work with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission Behavioral Health Workforce Subcommittee on the Mental Health Loan Repayment Program. The subcommittee is working with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to explore opportunities for alternative sustainable funding for the program. This includes diverting licensing fees from general revenue (mentioned earlier) to the program if the Legislature does not agree to further reduce fees in the 2024-25 state budget.

**Federal Advocacy**

Several of TPA’s members have been working with the American Psychological Association (APA) to address concerns with a bill by Congresswoman Lizzie Fletcher. Congresswoman Fletcher has introduced a bill that provides grants or incentive payments to physicians and primary health care practices that implement collaborative care models—which exclude psychologists. Our goal is to instead encourage integrated primary and behavioral health care. Those heavily involved in this advocacy effort include Drs. Stacey Ogbeide and Robin Burks.

If you haven’t read it yet, Drs. Ogbeide and Alex Young discuss the model in the latest issue of the *Texas Psychologist*.
Dr. Stagner has also been busy providing updates to the No Surprises Act for TPA Members. This federal law requires that patients be given a good faith estimate of the cost of services. This law applies to all healthcare services, including psychological services.

If you have any questions about the information contained within this report, please email Jessica Magee at jessica@texaspsyc.org.