

MEMBER SERVICES

PSD continues to prioritize member recruitment, retention and engagement. Our programs and initiatives are inclusive and we welcome and encourage member and non-member psychiatrists to participate and to engage in health care issues and initiatives happening throughout the state. We will continue to work collaboratively with Medical Society of Delaware (MSD) and other stakeholders to achieve common goals in support of our mission and to ensure that psychiatry has a voice on the numerous issues that impact their profession and patients. In 2020, we want to expand on our efforts to engage psychiatry residents and early career psychiatrists in organized psychiatry and to provide opportunities that support them in their training and career.

ADVOCACY

The second half of the 150th Delaware General Assembly (GA) convened on January 14, 2020 and will end on June 30, 2020. At that time, all pending legislation that has not passed both chambers to be signed by the Governor must be reintroduced if it is to be considered in the 151st GA which will convene in January 2021. PSD works closely with MSD on legislative issues and there are a number of proposed bills this session that we are tracking to include:

Physician-Assisted Suicide (HB 140) - While this bill appeared to be defeated after failing to clear committee in May of 2019, we will continue to monitor as the sponsor is deeply committed to the issue and the debate has been elevated by the News Journal. At the annual meeting, MSD heard the PSD Resolution to the MSD Board asking them to commit to adherence to the AMA Code of Ethics. While the resolution was tabled, a competing resolution to move MSD to a position of “engaged neutrality” on the issue was defeated. While opposition remains from both MSD and PSD, there is an ongoing discussion around the role of the AMA ethical guidelines.

Physician Assistants (PAs) Collaborative Practice (HB 169) - This bill changes the relationship between physicians and physician assistants from supervisory to collaborative. It retains a 1:4 ratio of physician assistants to physicians, unless a regulation of the Board increases or decreases the number and adds two physician assistant members to the Board of Medical Licensure and Discipline. The bill also authorizes physician assistants to participate as uncompensated volunteers in public or community events. PSD adamantly opposes this scope of practice creep by the PAs and will continue to push back against this bill.

Gun Shop Project (HB 240) - This bill is modeled after New Hampshire’s statewide “Gun Shop Project,” which reaches out to gun shops regarding the role they can play in suicide prevention. At least 21 other states have implemented similar campaigns. The bill would establish the Delaware Gun Shop Project (“Project”), under which the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health would develop training for individuals licensed in the State to sell firearms or is a gun shop employee on the role they can have in suicide prevention and to create relevant materials for distribution at Delaware gun shops. PSD is supportive of this idea and will be reviewing this legislation at its next meeting to determine an official stance.

Genetics Based Discrimination (SB 144) – This is a complex proposal, but at its heart is aimed at removing barriers in the physician-patient relationship that are arising from the proliferation of genetic testing in and out of the clinical setting. The bill would ban discrimination on the basis of genetic testing. Discrimination is already banned under both Federal and State law in regards to health insurance. This includes both genetic testing in a clinical setting as well as direct-to-consumer genetic tests in the selling/issuing of life, disability, and long-term care insurance. However, the bill contents are in flux and some version of the bill would allow risk rating policy premiums if the tests were ordered by a physician after a diagnosis (which is already an unregulated area under the law.) PSD position to date has been for the strongest version of the bill with an outright prohibition and we are actively engaged with the bill’s sponsor in trying to set a strong national standard.

Behavioral Health Well Checks – This yet-unfiled legislation would require insurers to pay for an annual mental health/behavioral health screening much like people get an annual physical exam. Ideally, these would be part of the primary care collaborative approach to medicine. PSD supports this concept, but there are a number of areas in the current draft that need to be addressed. Specifically: 1) Wellness checks should be done by a doctoral level clinician and not by a master’s level as is currently proposed; 2) Proper evaluations will undoubtedly reveal adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) which could further inflame the issue of broken requirements for mandatory reporting of child abuse even in adult care. This could end up overwhelming an already overburdened state response system and cause people to refuse these assessments even when offered as a new benefit; 3) The issue of what validated health screening tools should be used and who is licensed/qualified to administer and interpret these screens must be clarified; 4) The Wellness checks would ideally be done in a way to integrate in patient continuity of care, working with the primary care system.

Delaware Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) Restructuring - The legislature is beginning to discuss (and likely will) break up DHSS into two different departments. Exactly what divisions will go where is yet to be determined. PSD has been generally neutral about this proposal but has provided input to promote that any restructuring must include, but not be limited to the following important factors: 1) All changes should reflect a priority and commitment to maintaining high quality, patient centered care; 2) The recruitment and retention of highly qualified, well-trained, properly credentialed, fully licensed professionals to provide medical, psychological, behavioral healthcare must be a priority; 3) A fair and competitive wage structure is critical to both recruitment and retention and is equally as important as examining the processes and structures in place that will improve staff empowerment and satisfaction; 4) All changes made should include independent, objective outcome measurements that will allow for sustained quality improvement.

EDUCATION

Planning will soon be underway for the 9th Annual Psychiatric Society of Delaware Symposium scheduled for Saturday, September 26, 2020 at MSD Conference Center in Newark, Delaware.

STRENGTH OF ORGANIZATION

PSD officers for the two-year term July 1, 2019-June 30, 2021: President, Dyanne Simpson, DO; President-Elect, Ayesha Silman, MD; Secretary, Adrienne Yourek, MD and; Treasurer, Peter Zorach, MD. Councilor at Large for the three-year term July 1, 2017-June 30, 2020: Neil Kaye, MD; Councilors at Large for the two-year term, July 1, 2019-June 30, 2021: Carol Tavani, MD and Parth Viroja, MD and; Councilors at Large for the one-year term July 1, 2019-June 30, 2020: Zarrah Keshwani, MD; Robert Gorkin, MD and; Charles Jin, MD.

Respectfully submitted,

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