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Re: Endorsing Prescriptive Authority for Psychologists

This letter will hopefully provide you with information, from a Psychiatrist in practice since 1978, based on 14 years of working with psychologists with prescriptive authority in New Mexico. The experience has been positive for both New Mexicans and for my professional practice. By way of full disclosure, psychologists have NEVER paid me for my opinion on this matter and I have been appointed to the New Mexico State board overseeing the licensing process. I serve without pay.

In New Mexico, we have had a Psychologist Prescriptive Authority law since 2002. It has been a great boon for the people of New Mexico. They have had increased access to quality psychological care, with the use of psychotropic medication when indicated. Even in Santa Fe and Albuquerque, where most of the state's psychiatrists practice, it was difficult to get an accurate psychological assessment and treatment with medication. Wait times were long and access was limited. In rural New Mexico, the problem was even greater.

The New Mexico law has served our state well. In 14 years, there have been about 55 psychologists who have been licensed and there has not been a single action taken against psychologists for unsafe practices. None. We need more psychologists with their degree of competence and dedication. Our state's mental health needs are still not met. Fears of being "overrun" by psychologists as well as fears of undertrained psychologists hurting patients have been shown to be completely without foundation. This is true for patients in general, as well as special populations, such as children and the elderly. Psychologists consult regularly with other professionals, especially doctors, for the management of medical conditions beyond their specialty. Psychologists have proven themselves to be team players in serving the mental health needs our state.

Every study of psychotropic medication prescribing demonstrates that the majority of these medications are prescribed non-psychiatrist physicians, such as internists or family practice doctors. Psychologists bring diagnostic and therapeutic expertise to the community. When looking at the additional training for prescriptive authority for psychologist, it is important to remember this training occurs in addition to the many years of psychological education that makes psychologists experts in accurate diagnosing, the true basis for effective prescribing.

Over the years, many doctors, especially in family practice have shared with me their experiences. One aspect stood out: Even before the law passed, they consulted psychologists in their community for diagnostic advice about their patients, and even recommendations for medications. The psychologists were de facto managing the care and the overworked doctors were writing the prescriptions. The law authorized psychologists to manage these patients, including medications, when indicated. Rather than competing with doctors, psychologists continued to be a part of an effective team of care providers. This is true today. Hard working doctors who care about their patients expressed gratitude for psychologists as prescribing colleagues. Even psychiatrists, who back in 2002, complained because of their fears of the competition from and inadequate training of psychologists with prescriptive authority have calmed down. These psychiatrists admit that they are busier than ever and psychologists provide high quality care.

Our governor at the time the law passed, Gary Johnson, a Republican, found support on both sides of the aisle from legislators. Ultimately, serving the well-being of the people of New Mexico won the day when he signed the bill into law. It was politics at its best in service to our state.

Please feel free to contact me, if I can offer any additional information or clarification.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Donald E. Fineberg, M.D." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Donald E. Fineberg, M.D.