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Members of the Prescribing Psychologist Permit Technical Review Committee  
c/o Ron Briel, Program Manager, Credentialing Review Program  
Licensure Unit, Division of Public Health  
P.O. Box 95026  
Lincoln, NE 68509

Dear Members of the Prescribing Psychologist Permit Technical Review Committee:

I'm writing in support for prescriptive authority for psychologists with postdoctoral training in psychopharmacology. As both a practicing psychologist and as a resident of western Nebraska, I can attest to the need for additional prescribers of medication for patients with mental illness in rural areas. I strongly support the recently submitted proposal from the Nebraska Psychological Association which would allow psychologists with specialized post-doctoral training in psychopharmacology to prescribe psychotropic medication in our state.

I earned a postdoctoral master's degree in clinical psychopharmacology from an accredited university. If Nebraska credentialed prescribing psychologists I would be in a position to better meet the needs of behavioral health patients in the panhandle. I would be able to provide patients psychological services and mental health medications. Patients with major mental illness, in particular, need a combination of psychotherapy and mental health medications.

The entire western part of the state has had no more than 3-4 psychiatrists practicing at any given time. I work with the three psychiatrists in Scottsbluff at the Regional West Medical Center and Physician's Clinic. The next closest psychiatrist is located in North Platte. In addition, we have three psychiatric nurse practitioners, one here at RWMC and two in the community. The psychiatrists and the NP here are extremely capable and hard-working, but often cannot meet the needs of individuals with mental illness for medication management in a timely manner. People with serious mental illness who need psychotropic medication management often wait two to three months for a psychiatric consultation. Some of our primary care providers and other specialists end up treating the mental health needs of their patients. However, not all non-psychiatric physicians feel equipped or want the responsibility of handling complex mental illness. In addition we have a very difficult time recruiting and retaining psychiatrists.

Prescribing psychologists, with a thorough understanding of psychiatric illness and treatment, and additional training in psychopharmacology, would be well suited to see clients with mental illness for combined therapy and medication management. That would reduce the heavy burden on the psychiatrists we do have, allow for the provision of more comprehensive mental health care in areas of the state that are underserved, and provide more timely and integrated care for individuals struggling with mental illness.

The major argument against psychologists with special training having prescriptive authority cites safety as the reason, but this has been shown not to be the case. There is now a 20 year history of psychologists prescribing in the US military and a 10 year history of medical psychologists prescribing safely in two states, and in the Indian Health Service. In the time they have been prescribing, there have been no complaints against psychologists with prescriptive authority for their use of medications. Prescribing psychologists have an excellent safety record. In fact, in 2009, when Louisiana passed Act 251, the Executive Director of the medical board testified in favor of the bill, and in doing so, he said, "We recognize that they (Medical Psychologists) are very safe prescribers."

In conclusion, allowing psychologists with specialized, advanced training in psychopharmacology to prescribe psychiatric medications for our patients with mental illness would significantly improve the quality of psychiatric care we can provide in Nebraska. It would lessen the impact of the shortage of psychiatrists, it will make mental health treatment more accessible, particularly in rural areas with limited access to care, and all the evidence indicates that specially trained psychologists are extremely safe prescribers.

Sincerely,

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Postdoctoral Masters of Science in Clinical Psychopharmacology