

ROBERT SHERRILL, Jr., Ph.D.

PRESCRIBING PSYCHOLOGIST

To: Committee members considering the application for qualified psychologists to prescribe in Nebraska

27 March 2017

Dear Members of the Committee:

Psychologists who have completed an additional master's degree in psychopharmacology have been licensed in New Mexico to prescribe medications for emotional disorders since 2005. I am writing to provide you information concerning this from two different perspectives.

First, I have practiced as a psychologist in a rural community for 40 years. New Mexico is something like Nebraska, in that we have one large city (Albuquerque), then our state capital about an hour away, then many miles of sparsely populated land to reach a scattering of smaller communities. Driving from Albuquerque to Farmington, where I live and practice, is roughly the same as traveling from Lincoln to North Platte. We have chronic problems with persons who need medication for emotional disorders gaining access to care: a typical time for a first appointment with one of our psychiatrists is two months. In addition, the very long distances which many persons must drive to maintain care makes it difficult to follow through consistently.

I had wondered what happened to persons who urgently needed psychiatric hospitalization when the psychiatric beds at our community hospital were full. I discovered part of the answer when I began consulting at our county jail: just over 40% of all the adult inmates were taking psychiatric medications, and a number of them had been brought to jail acutely psychotic after being arrested for minor crimes, even though the officer was well aware that they probably needed to be in a hospital. I believe that any sheriff of a rural county in Nebraska would agree that jails are often being used as unofficial psychiatric units; and that getting appropriate medication for these inmates in a timely manner has been very difficult.

My second perspective is from having served as the chair of the New Mexico Board of Psychologist Examiners from 2006 to 2012. When the New Mexico Legislature was considering the bill to permit psychologists to train for prescribing privileges, opponents made grim predictions of harm to the public. However, from 2006 to 2012 there were no complaints at all made to the Board of Psychologist Examiners concerning harm to patients by prescribing psychologists. We did have one complaint concerning inappropriate dosing of medication: we requested a consultation by the Board of Pharmacy, which advised us that there was no problem. We had one other complaint about a prescribing psychologist trainee who had been instructed by his physician supervisor to maintain the physician's patients on narcotics prescribed by the physician while he was out of town. Although no patients were harmed, this was an obvious violation of federal rule, since the DEA classifies prescribing psychologists as ineligible to prescribe narcotics under any circumstance. This violation was caught by an alert pharmacist who was processing one of the trainee's prescriptions.

It has not been a financial burden on the state for New Mexico to implement its prescribing psychologist statute. The Psychologist Board is entirely self-supporting by fees from its licensees. The Board simply added categories for prescribing psychologist trainees and prescribers to our licensing procedures, developed a new form to document the additional training of a licensee applying for prescription privileges, and instituted an additional licensing fee of \$150 every two years. It was not necessary to add staff at the Board's office, or to increase fees for licensees who are not prescribers. Similarly, the additional malpractice insurance coverage in order to prescribe has not been a great burden on us: on my most recent insurance renewal in May 2014, I paid an additional \$188 to be a prescriber, which is about an 11% increase over the basic premium for New Mexico.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about this information.

Robert Sherrill Jr., PhD

Robert Sherrill, Jr., Ph.D.

Prescribing Psychologist

New Mexico Lic. #0013

DEA# MS1676127

For _____ Date _____

D.O.B. _____

Security Statement: The front of this prescription paper is BLUE in color from edge to edge and has an RCI watermark printed on the reverse side. If these features are missing or if there is any damage to the ink or paper indicative of an attempt to make alterations, this prescription should be deemed invalid.

Rx

VOID

GENERIC OK

DISPENSE AS WRITTEN

Robert Sherrill, Jr., Ph.D.

701 W. Apache • Farmington, NM 87401 • Phone (505) 327-7777

Not Valid for Narcotics. Call to confirm for Anxiolytics or Sedatives

This is not required by statute or regulation. I decided to put it on my script form as an additional protection in case my script pads were stolen, or a script was altered (I work with alcoholics and addicts). Also, although I am licensed to prescribe benzo's, I never do so, and that is why they are mentioned.