



Support of House Bill No. 7822 and Senate Bill No. 2611

I am writing to recommend the passage of House Bill No. 7822 and Senate Bill No. 2611 that provides for exceptions to the widespread practice of insurers requiring Step Therapy. Step Therapy practices by health insurers provide barriers to patients receiving the latest and best treatments as determined by their licensed healthcare practitioner. It often creates lengthy delays for patients to get the most effective and sometimes lifesaving treatments. It requires the healthcare practitioner to provide trials of medications, treatments that are less effective, require the failure of other practices, provide medications with known side effects, or services that will be detrimental to the patient in the eyes of the clinical judgement of their healthcare practitioner.

As the former CEO of Newport Mental Health, a provider of community-based behavioral health services, I know that the use of restrictive step therapy requirements is a frequent practice that restricts the provision of the latest and most effective psychiatric medications to our patients. Insurers regularly require the use of lower cost, psychotropic medications that are not on patent even when the psychiatric provider knows from history and/or clinical judgement that their use will not be effective or will cause serious side effects. The current practice by insurers in Rhode Island is that the psychiatrist must first try three non-patent medications in the same medication class before they can make a written appeal for the medication that in the medical judgment of the practitioner is indicated. Common problems such as excessive weight gain, serious side effects, or when the medication just does not work results in takes months to years of delay in getting the proper treatment the patient needs. In the latter case, this can be life threatening when a patient is denied access to a medication that will remediate suicide or psychosis.

The effect of these Step Therapy requirements by insurers guarantees that patients will not receive the type of medications they need. The administrative burden alone is so time consuming that it virtually guarantees not getting lifesaving medications to patients. As you know, the extremely low outpatient rates across the board in Rhode Island do not allow practitioners the time to complete these lengthy and restrictive administrative procedures. The amendments to this bill start to put some guardrails by providing reasonable exceptions when to control the barriers to care created by the insurers use of Step Therapy.

I urge passage of HB 7822 and SB 2611.

Sincerely,

Jamie Lehane