

KANSAS MENTAL HEALTH COALITION

An Organization Dedicated to Improving the Lives of Kansans with Mental Illnesses

Testimony presented to the House Health and Human Services Committee
Support HB 2259

Amy A. Campbell – February 14, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to address your committee today on behalf of the Kansas Mental Health Coalition. The Kansas Mental Health Coalition is dedicated to improving the lives of Kansans living with Mental Illnesses and Severe Emotional Disorders.

The Coalition supports improving access to mental health medications and reducing administrative burdens on the current mental health workforce. Please support HB 2259.

Research supports exempting mental health drugs from restricted access and identifies problems with step therapy policies, yet the Kansas Legislature approved the use of prior authorization in 2015 and step therapy in 2016 for Medicaid. Step therapy requires patients to “fail first” on a less expensive medication before they can be prescribed a restricted medication chosen by their doctor.

Research is plentiful to show that interruptions in treatment result in emergency room visits, repeated hospitalizations, homelessness, incarceration and even death by suicide. The Kansas Legislature created the Mental Health Medication Advisory Committee (MHMAC) in 2015 as a compromise to adopt prior authorization for mental health medications. Policymakers agreed the policies should focus on the safety of Kansans, particularly children, and minimize harm from medication interruptions and avoid excessive administrative requirements for prescribers. However, rarely does research accompany the prior authorization policies implemented by third party payors.

KMHC is concerned the MHMAC process lacks transparency and offers little opportunity for meaningful public input. Policies are not posted for review and attendees do not have access to the information being discussed by the committee.

Why this matters: Many mental health consumers, like others with chronic diseases, need medication to recover, to alleviate symptoms and make the illness “manageable.” Access to the full range of FDA approved medications, including new and often most effective drugs, promotes successful treatment. The right medication can be the difference between recovery and devastating decompensation. Our under-resourced mental health system is strained by inconsistent prior authorization practices.

The bottom line: KMHC opposes step therapy and prior authorization policies for mental health medications which focus on costs rather than drug efficacy. Cumbersome policies and burdensome consultation requirements stretch an already understaffed workforce at a time when we can’t afford to have clinical staff waiting on hold for extended periods of time.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. Please feel free to contact me at any time to discuss these issues further.

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