



North Carolina Psychiatric Association

NEWS RELEASE

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NC Psychiatric Association Releases Its “Report Card on the Clinical Impact of North Carolina’s Mental Health Reform”

Raleigh, NC—The North Carolina Psychiatric Association (NCPA) released its “Report Card on the Clinical Impact of North Carolina’s Mental Health Reform” today based on data on state hospital admissions from July 1999 through April 2005 obtained from the Division of Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse Services (DMHDDSAS).

The Report Card identifies (1) dramatic increases in state hospital admissions since August 2003 for children & adolescent consumers and (2) since March 2004 for adult consumers, as well as (3) a sustained decrease in geropsychiatry admissions.

"State hospital admissions are a key indicator (and currently one of the few available) of what is happening clinically to consumers at the local level," said Margery Sved, M.D., President of NCPA. "It is not a perfect measure. The promise of Reform was that admissions would decline. We are now almost four years into Mental Health Reform and it is time to present some measure of clinical performance for public discussion."

"NCPA has been a consistent supporter of the Mental Health Reform effort, despite criticism from some of our own members and other groups. But as anecdotal reports have multiplied, NCPA has noticed that information about the clinical effect of Mental Health Reform has not yet been made public," Dr. Sved said.

According to NCPA, reports on the progress of mental health reform have focused on administrative accomplishments, such as business plans and contracts, and not on the real effects on consumers. "No one could describe any direct evidence of the clinical effect of Mental Health Reform, and there was general agreement among our members that the best available measure was state hospital admissions," said Robin Huffman, Executive Director of NCPA. "For this reason, NCPA requested and analyzed the admissions data."

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"The point here is to start a public discussion, based on data and based on outcomes. We believe that this is the first time information about the clinical impact of Mental Health Reform has been made publicly available," said Dr. Sved. "This is not an indictment of the reform process, and NCPA is not trying to point fingers and assign blame."

In releasing its analysis of the admission patterns of the four state psychiatric hospitals since 1999, the Association calls for the Mental Health Reform effort to be addressed as a state emergency and to be given high legislative priority for the current state budget. "We recognize that we are a little late in the budget process to be suggesting more resources for the public mental health system," Huffman stated. "But we have just finished analyzing this information, which is too compelling to not include in the budget discussions. We urge legislators to help provide adequate funding of the community mental health system."

Additional concerns/suggestions NCPA expressed in its Report Card:

- The loss of functioning services and of dedicated public sector clinicians in the state.
- Where there are insufficient numbers of public sector clinicians to serve consumers, active steps should be taken to retain and recruit needed staff.
- State Hospital beds should not be downsized until it is clear those beds are no longer needed as a safety net for consumers.
- DMHDDSAS needs to reopen substantive communication with stakeholders, to assure that important questions of access and clinical capacity are meaningfully addressed.
- Future DMHDDSAS and Legislative Oversight Committee reports on the progress of Mental Health Reform must focus on person-/consumer-oriented measures of clinical impact.

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The North Carolina Psychiatric Association is the voluntary, professional association for psychiatric physicians in the state and is a District Branch of the American Psychiatric Association, representing more than 830 psychiatrists. NCPA supports and promotes access to and delivery of quality psychiatric services to the citizens of North Carolina and promotes the availability of needed mental health services in the state.