



Coalition Briefs

A SEMI-MONTHLY UPDATE ON COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH IN NEW YORK

New Board of Directors

At The Coalition's Annual Meeting on December 3rd the mantle of leadership was passed to a new Executive Committee and new members were welcomed onto the Board of Directors. Sad as we were to witness the end of the Mary D. Redd era, we are very excited to begin working with our new President, former Coalition Vice President and **JBFC**S Executive Vice President Alan B. Siskind. The newly elected members of the Executive Committee are:

President	Alan B. Siskind
Vice President	Mildred Allen
Treasurer	Peter Campanelli
Secretary	Thelma Dye
Immediate Past President	Mary D. Redd

Community Access' Steve Coe and **ARMI's** Sabra Goldman are welcome new additions to the Board of Directors. They join Jane Bardavid, Joan DiBlasi, Pearl Johnson, Joyce Pilsner, Ken Popler, Ray Schwartz, Vince Valentino and Ethel Wyner, who were all re-elected to the Board.

Also at the meeting members were elected to the 1999 Nominating Committee. Ray Schwartz and Gayle DeRienzi were chosen for this important committee. ▣

Assembly passes a COLA unanimously

On December 1st at about 7:00 p.m. the New York State Assembly voted without dissent to provide a 2.5% Cost of Living Adjustment for the lowest paid workers of community mental health agencies. During a special session in which they also voted to provide themselves with a COLA, the Assembly allocated nearly \$33 million for a COLA for human services workers. The funds will be distributed as follows:

\$13 million	Office of Mental Health
\$7.2 million	Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services
\$9.8 million	Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities
\$2.5 million	Office of Child and Family Services
\$350,000	Department of Health (for workers who provide care for people with cerebral palsy)

With the exception of the bill allocating the funds for cerebral palsy workers, the bills passed by the Assembly are identical to bills passed by the Senate before the end of the legislative session in June. The Governor's signature is the only missing piece. We expect his signature to be forthcoming because of a June 19 release published by his press office entitled "I would sign COLAs for mental health workers." In the release the Governor declared that "These individuals perform critically important work that directly enhances the quality of life for thousands of mentally disabled individuals and their families...They deserve this pay increase..."

We recognize that these bills do not apply to many members and do not solve the whole problem, but they are hopefully a step in the right direction. The Coalition will continue to work for a **long-term** solution to the COLA problem that will cover **ALL** inflationary needs for **ALL** community-based mental health agencies. ▣

Kings County Hospital in no danger

In the previous issue of Coalition Briefs (November 20, 1998) we published an article entitled "Kings County Hospital in Danger," in which we indicated that HCFA had found grave problems at Kings County and was considering rescinding their Medicare funding. We regret that we did not contact HHC to confirm the validity of the story and hear HHC's response to the allegations. We apologize to our readership and HHC for this.

In the name of fairness, we have

since spoken with Dr. Jane Zimmerman, Senior Vice President for Communications and Marketing at HHC. Dr. Zimmerman indicated that HHC feels "unfairly targeted by HCFA." She stressed that the stories in the press focused on three incidents of the more than 100,000 emergency room visits a year at Kings County Hospital. She also pointed out that when the HCFA Statement of Deficiencies was filed, the criticisms of the hospital were related solely to process and documenta-

tion, and made no critique of patient care.

Kings County has taken two specific steps to address the complaints of the HCFA investigators. A clinic to which people are referred if they don't present an emergency has been moved closer to the ER, and a sign reminding patients to present their proof of insurance has been removed from the waiting room.

Reports of denials of care to uninsured patients have been "grossly exaggerated," according to Dr. Zimmerman, "we treat everyone and we always have...we are the safety net." ▣

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— Help Wanted —

Brennan moves to protect patients in State Hospitals

Assembly Mental Health Committee Chair James Brennan is introducing a piece of legislation aimed at protecting patients in State-run psychiatric inpatient facilities who are the victims of negligence during their stay. The bill, which will be introduced in January, aims to stop the Attorney General's policy of filing a counterclaim for care costs when indigent patients or their families sue for negligence after being seriously injured or killed in a State psychiatric hospital.

The legislation was drafted in response to the case of David Kaplan. Mr. Kaplan was a patient at Kingsboro Psychiatric Center who was murdered when an escaped patient with a long history of violence was brought back into the facility without being searched. Several hours later Mr. Kaplan was murdered with a knife the patient had concealed upon his return.

After investigations by a Kings County Grand Jury and the New York State Commission on Quality of Care, both issued reports criticizing the State for negligence, Mr. Kaplan's family filed a suit for wrongful death. In

response Attorney General Dennis Vacco filed a counterclaim for \$382,000 against Mr. Kaplan's estate for the cost of his treatment - including the day he was murdered. According to Chairman Brennan, "The Attorney General is essentially covering up gross negligence and abuse of State mental patients...It is the State's policy to seek restitution for the cost of care of State patients only in cases when patients sue New York State for redress for serious injury or death. This negates any chance of a victim's recovering and removes an important incentive for the State to correct unsafe or abusive practices."

Marc Wurzel, Spokesman for the Attorney General, replied that "The New York State Department of Law is mandated to seek an offset of the costs of providing services and care to individuals who file claims against State agencies who are providing such care and services. The law is designed to protect the interests of New York State's taxpayers."

The bill is currently being circulated for co-sponsorship. Senator Nicholas Spano has expressed an interest in introducing a companion bill in the Senate. We'll keep you posted. ▣

Award-winning mental health agency located in Central Harlem, seeks CSW with psychiatric and MICA experience. Successful candidate will supervise casework staff, coordinate intake referrals and interviews, interface with community agencies, and provide direct clinical services to a chronically mentally ill and homeless population. Knowledge of Department of Homeless Services, compliance standards and supervisory experience preferred. Excellent career opportunity, competitive salary and benefits. New graduates are encouraged to apply. Fax resume and cover letter to: **Weston United Community Renewal** Human Resources Administrator (212) 316-0789. ▣

Free OMH Safety Training

OMH is rolling out a safety training program for mental health workers. Beginning in January the project *Safety Training for Mental Health Workers in the Community* aims to increase staff safety by providing a knowledge base about clinical diffusion techniques, safe release skills and safe conduct in the field. The project is being headed by MHANYS in collaboration with The Coalition, The New York State Council, ACL and NYAPRS.

The Coalition has succeeded in obtaining slots for two teams (of two people) of trainers to receive a free three-day course in exchange for an agreement to provide at least one two-day training in the following year. OMH will cover the costs of all support materials and videotapes necessary to run a training session. Those who participate should be interested in training their colleagues who work in high-risk areas.

There are two NYC area training sessions scheduled, February 16-18 and May 4-6. At each of these The Coalition has been allocated slots for a team of trainers. Interested member agencies should contact Joshua Rubin at (212) 586-4555x17 or jfrubin@cvmha.org. ▣

Upcoming Events

December 15	Task force on Long-Term COLA Solutions at CVMHA Managed Care Technical Assistance at CSS
December 18	Committee on Co-Occurring Psychiatric and Addictive Disorders at CVMHA
December 24	Coalition closed in honor of Christmas
December 25	Christmas - Coalition closed
December 31	New Year's Eve - Coalition closed
January 1	New Year's Day - Coalition closed

**Happy Holidays from all of us
at The Coalition**