



Coalition Briefs

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

Apres nous, le blackout

The Coalition will hold an *expanded* Membership Meeting on Monday, November 16th, at **Puerto Rican Family Institute, 145 W. 15th St., 7th Floor Conference Room, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.** Barry Brauth, Director of the State Office of Mental Health Bureau of Financial Planning, has agreed to discuss two issues: (1) Special Needs Plan (SNP) Finance Issues and (2) a proposal for a new Community Behavioral Health Organization (COMBHO) program and licensing. Both subjects are of key significance for mental health providers. With expansion of the Meeting through the lunch hour, a Dutch treat lunch will be available.

Mr. Brauth will answer questions about fiscal methodology for the upcoming Adult Mental Health SNPs. His presentation is of special urgency, as it may be our last opportunity to have such a discussion before the SNP "blackout" period begins.

Mr. Brauth will also outline SOMH's current exploration of development of a new outpatient program category, COMBHO. The State has asserted that the purpose of such a program is "to promote and sustain the recovery of adults with a diagnosis of mental illness and children with a diagnosis of emotional disturbance through the provision of a wide range of ambulatory treatment, rehabilitation and support services" under one license. Mr. Brauth will discuss the availability of the COMBHO program category as an optional alternative for existing licensed outpatient providers. ▣

Bulky budget bill brings big bonanza

Weighing in at nearly 40 pounds, the \$500 billion Omnibus Appropriations Bill passed by the 105th Congress contained a host of victories and some losses for the mental health community.

Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) programs were funded at the high levels recommended by the House Appropriations Committee. Key increases include:

- \$13.4 million for the Community Mental Health Block Grant
- \$5 million for the Children's Mental Health Services Program
- \$3 million for the PATH Program
- \$1 million for the Protection and Advocacy Program

The biggest mental health funding increase came in the form of a \$40 million increase in the CMHS Knowledge Development and Application Program. This increase is especially gratifying because the mechanism by which it was introduced was problematic. Rep. David Obey (D-WI) sponsored an amendment that would have removed the mandate that Medicaid cover Via-

gra, directing the savings to school-based children's mental health programs. In conference committee the Viagra funding mechanism was dropped and an alternative funding source was found for "children with emotional and behavioral disorders who are at risk of violent behavior." ▣

Historic increases in funding for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) should also be celebrated. NIH funding was increased \$2 billion an addition of 14.7 percent. The National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH) received a 15 percent funding increase of \$112 million. The NIMH funding is sufficient to double mental illness research in five years.

Sadly, an amendment by Senator Paul Wellstone (D-MN) which would have allowed federal prison construction money to be used for the creation of mental health screening and treatment programs in correctional facilities was left out of the bill. Senator Wellstone has vowed to reintroduce the amendment during the 106th Congress. ▣

Merger may move

Now that the election is over and that the Mayor and Speaker are talking, rumors are rife about merger between NYCDOH and DMH. The Coalition is not in a position to confirm any of them at this time, but an unnamed City Council staffer said, "I expect it to move, it's just a matter of when." What we can report, is that The Mayor's office has delivered a final report on the proposed merger to the City Council. Dan Still and other key DMH staffers are headquartered half time (or more) at 125 Worth Street. The Government Operations Committee must schedule at least one more meeting on the matter and then hold a vote before it appears on the docket of the full City Council. ▣

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SNP news

The latest word from the Office of Mental Health is that Westchester County has officially asked to participate in the first round SNP procurement. On the other end of the City, Long Island counties have indicated that they wish to participate in a second procurement round. The RFP (minus the finance chapter) seems to be heading for approval by the Department of Health, so it appears that we can expect the release of the RFP sometime before the New Year. SOMH's Barry Brauth will meet with Coalition members on November 16 to discuss the financial aspects of the SNPs. Expect a blackout to begin shortly thereafter. ▣

Hospitals for sale

The Empire State Development Corporation is offering for sale two of New York's dozen State psychiatric hospitals. The 81 acre Binghamton site and 387 acre Poughkeepsie hospital (which includes a nine-hole golf course) have been unused for five years as the State mental hospital population has declined from a high of 95,000 in the 1950s to 5,445. We will be keeping a close eye on these sales to ensure that any profits are Reinvested into the community-based system. ▣

Circus sold-out

If you have not yet got tickets for the Coalition's Big Apple Circus event on November 12, take a lesson from Cubs fans and wait 'till next year. If you were wise enough to order your tickets early, remember that the Circus starts at 6:30 p.m. sharp. Don't be late, there's never a dull minute. ▣

MIS Technical Assistance

Jim Chiang, a management information consultant, has been retained by the Coalition to help members address their changing information technology needs. Mr. Chiang, President of Capstone Resource Corporation, an independent information technology consulting company, will lead a series of focus groups aimed at identifying member agencies' information technology needs. Upon completion of the focus groups the findings will be analyzed and an RFP will be sent to technology vendors in order to select the "best fit" product(s) at the most competitive prices. If funding permits he will customize the software to meet the needs of the different types of programs and/or populations, e.g. clubhouses, clinics, continuing day programs as well as residential programs.

The sessions will be held on November 30 and December 1, 2, and 3, grouped according to functional responsibilities. The November 30th meeting will be held at ICL, 40 Rector Place, for financial and MIS staff from 9:30 am to 12:30pm and 1:30pm - 4:30pm. The sessions for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd of December will all be held at Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, Inc., 281 Park Ave. South. More information (and an RSVP) regarding times and places will be sent out next week. ▣

Member Notes

ARMI has found that the provision of 24-hour clinical coverage through pagers is an effective crisis prevention measure. Staff at the program receives an average of five pages per month. Half of the pages result from emotional distress and psychiatric symptoms. Ten percent are medication clarification questions, and only about seven percent of calls are for non-emergencies. The remarkable facet of the utilization data is that the professional staff can deal with more than 99% of problems over the telephone, saving immeasurable time and expense. ▣

The **Jewish Guild for the Blind** has openings in a tele-support group for people with a vision impairment who live with HIV/AIDS. The group is open to anyone within the five boroughs who has trouble leaving home to access supportive services. An in-person interview is required at the beginning and end of the eight-week program. Call (212) 769-6263 for more information. ▣

On Friday, November 13, the **Staten Island Mental Health Society, Inc.** will present the 1998 Dr. Richard M. Silberstein Award for service to the children of Staten Island to Dorothy A. Clark. The award is a tribute to founding Director Richard Silberstein, who founded the agency in 1952 and directed it for 21 years. Ms. Clark is the Assistant Director of the Elizabeth W. Pouch Center for Special People. She has been with **Staten Island Mental Health Society** since 1967. ▣

The **William F. Ryan Community Health Center** is offering free flu shots to any adult in New York City. Through mid-December Ryan medical staff will give a flu shot to anyone who requests it, provided that medical guidelines indicate the shot can be given safely. Fliers are available if you wish to publicize the free shots. Call (212) 749-1820 for more information. ▣

Upcoming Events

November 10	Taskforce on Long-Term COLA Strategy at CVMHA
November 11	Veteran's Day - Coalition closed
November 12	Finance Committee at CVMHA Executive Committee at CVMHA
	Big Apple Circus
November 16	Special membership meeting with Barry Brauth at PRFI
November 18	Committee on Co-Existing Psychiatric and Addictive Disorders at PRFI
November 24	Managed Care Technical Assistance at FPWA
December 3	Coalition Annual Meeting