

Director of Professional Affairs Report continued

The intangible benefits to membership, however, are just as important, if not more so. Membership in MPA can provide a built-in support system to protect against feelings of isolation and burnout that can occur when we devote so much of our time and energy to the well-being of others. Many of our members have already spoken of the increased emotional toll of practice since the beginning of the year. Regardless of political orientation, one cannot ignore the increase in clients reporting anxiety, depression, and trauma in response to recent changes in federal policy and protections. Beyond our work as practitioners, members may also be grappling with similar fears and uncertainty in their personal lives, making the toll of practice that much more intense.

One area that causes anxiety for the vast majority of psychologists is the potential repeal and replacement of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Behavioral health providers are particularly worried about the fate of their patients, since the ACA created additional parity protections for mental health benefits and the current plan proposed for replacement does not include any mandate for coverage of mental health and substance use disorders. Again, providers may be working to manage a client's anxiety about potentially losing access to health care, while simultaneously struggling with their own fear about no longer being able to afford health care. Similar situations may also occur with other issues, like immigration or LGBTQ rights.

Situations such as this underscore the need to take care of ourselves as people, in order to maximize our effectiveness as practitioners and advocates. As we know, social support and a sense of belonging are important protective factors in self-care, and you can find them through MPA, via our listserv, MPA-sponsored socials, and other events that bring you together with colleagues. Similarly, identifying potential courses of action can reduce the sense of helplessness that may occur when anxiety-provoking situations are occurring at a societal level, thus making them beyond our control. MPA has already taken action by adopting a strong stance on the protection of vulnerable populations, as seen with our most recent press release about the immigration orders. We will continue to identify areas to take action, both as an organization and as a guide to those members who are looking for ways to become more involved.

We must make it a priority to come together to provide support as a means of protection for ourselves, and to provide motivation and direction as a means to advocacy. This includes reaching out to all of our fellow psychologists who are not MPA members, to inform them of our work in protecting both our clients and our profession, and encouraging them to join us in these endeavors. After all, there is strength in numbers, and I believe that the full strength of Massachusetts psychologists is a powerful force that can enact real change.