



ARIZONA PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY

2401 West Peoria Avenue, Suite 130 • Phoenix, Arizona 85029-4790
Phone (602) 347-6903 • Fax (602) 242-6283 • <http://azpsych.org> • admin@azmed.org

Jasleen Chhatwal, MD
President

Maya Heck, MD
Vice-President

Stephen (Larry) Mecham, DO
Treasurer

Yazhini Srivathsal, MD
Secretary

March 12, 2021

House Health and Human Services Committee

Rep. Joanne Osborne (R-AZ-13), Chair

Rep. Regina Cobb (R-AZ-5), Vice Chair

Rep. Kelli Butler (D-AZ-28)

Rep. Joseph Chaplik (R-AZ-23)

Rep. Randy Friese (D-AZ-9)

Rep. Alma Hernandez (D-AZ-3)

Rep. Jacqueline Parker (R-AZ-16)

Rep. Amish Shah (D-AZ-24)

Rep. Justin Wilmeth (R-AZ-15)

Re: Letter in Support of SB1270 – Step Therapy – Arizona Psychiatric Society

Dear Honorable Chair, Vice Chair, and Representatives:

On behalf of the Arizona Psychiatric Society (APS), which represents over 500 psychiatrist members in the state that serve as advocates for individuals living with mental illness, I am writing to share some personal, physician perspective on step therapy that I authored as a potential editorial piece, in demonstration of the position of support by the Society to pass SB1270.

A medical diagnosis involving mental health comes with a distinct set of challenges. As a psychiatrist, I can attest that most people, including other health professionals, have limited familiarity with mental health treatments and strategies. Treatment modalities, medications and even diagnoses, all require careful assessment and collaboration with the individual being treated.

Treatment options not only have to follow guidelines for care, but also take into account the patient's beliefs, adherence, and safety considerations. Weighing these additional factors are part of our training as psychiatrists and the work we do every day.

What is not in the patient care plan? The interference in the doctor-patient relationship through the insurance protocol known as "step therapy." This occurs when the insurance company denies coverage for necessary medication prescribed by the doctor, requiring the patient to try a different medication, show failure to get better, before they will cover the originally prescribed medication. This places undue burden on the patient, their support system, and the physician. It slows progression to health, keeping the person sicker longer.

March 12, 2021

Re: SB1270

Page Two

The worst situation is when a patient, stabilized on one medication during a hospitalization, gets denied coverage of that medication by insurance after leaving the hospital. Since each insurance company has its own list of preferred medications, there is no easy way to know what medication will be covered, making it a rude and damaging surprise at the outpatient pharmacy. For many patients, this is where they may get disillusioned and stop their efforts at treatment.

For others, the treating physician or their staff then spend hours communicating with insurance representatives advocating for the effective treatment – sometimes to no avail, needing to abide by randomly chosen, non-evidence-based step therapy protocols. Through extra doctor visits, possible hospitalizations, and medications that do not work, the patient suffers.

There must be a better way to improving the mental health of our community. SB1270 is legislation that aims to simplify the process, making it so step therapy protocols are made transparent and communication back from insurers is more timely. Let's together raise the standards of care for ourselves and those we love.

With thanks for your service to the residents of Arizona and our community, I am available to you answer any questions or provide additional information for your consideration of this important legislation.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chhatwal" in a cursive style, with "M.D." written in a smaller, simpler font below it.

Jasleen Chhatwal, MBBS, MD
President, Arizona Psychiatric Society