

HOUSE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
March 21, 2011

SENATE BILL 272
PSYCHOLOGISTS - PRESCRIPTIVE AUTHORITY

The Montana Health Care Association represents long term care facilities throughout the state of Montana.

We support SB 272 because we believe it will improve access to mental health services for the residents we serve.

Many of our residents have mental health issues including dementia, behavioral issues and depression. They are prescribed a variety of drugs including psychotropics and antipsychotics. Especially in the elderly, these drugs must be monitored closely and it is important for the physician or other prescriber to be closely involved in evaluating how the drugs are working and whether dosages need to be adjusted.

Our facilities report that they are unable to access the services of psychiatrists. Attending physicians - often general practitioners - express frustration about dealing with these types of medications. When they are stymied, they order a psychiatric evaluation - but the patient can wait 6 months or more before they can get an appointment with a psychiatrist. Depending on the severity of the problem, the patient may be discharged to a higher level of care because the facility is unable to cope with the behaviors or other issues while the patient is waiting for an appointment.

Nursing homes are required by federal law to assure that individuals who are on psychotropic and antipsychotic drugs are closely monitored by appropriate professionals, that unnecessary drugs are discontinued, and that dosage reductions are tried. This is difficult without the assistance of appropriate mental health professionals who are in the best position to try dose reductions, drug holidays, and the like.

We strongly believe our residents will benefit from access to mental health professionals who can not only prescribe these drugs but who can also be involved in determining when it is appropriate to discontinue certain drugs, to do a drug holiday, or to change the dosage. We believe there will be more monitoring of effectiveness and side effects and more opportunity to reduce dosages and eliminate unnecessary and ineffective drugs.

In short, we believe the people we serve will receive better mental health services by having better access to the services they need.

Please support SB 272.

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