

Sarkis Family Psychiatry

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Dear President Obama,

I am writing to alert you to recent actions by BCBS of Florida (BCBS-FL) that represent a serious threat to the Mental Health Parity Act and Addiction Equity (MHPAE).

I am the medical director of a community mental health clinic in Gainesville Florida. We are the largest provider of community mental health services in Northern Florida with over 10,000 visits by BCBS covered patients per year.

Earlier this summer, BCBS-FL sent notice to every mental health provider in the state that their contracts would be terminated after 11/30/11. They then announced that, in order to continue seeing their patients, psychiatrists and psychotherapists would have to accept cuts in reimbursement rates of up to 40%. In addition, participating mental health providers would also be required to comply with a new and entirely separate set of care management guidelines. In contrast, BCBS-FL has implemented none of these changes for medical or surgical services.

We have appealed to both the Florida Insurance Commissioner and to the Federal Secretaries of Treasury, Health and Human Services and Labor. All have declined to intervene.

In all honesty, I cannot understand how BCBS-FL has been allowed to proceed even this far. The MHPAEA was clearly designed to prevent health insurance companies from just this type of discriminatory action against those who need mental health care. If BCBS-FL is permitted to implement this deplorable plan, how can there be any hope that the MHPAEA will, in fact, prevent other health insurers from doing the same?

We have notified our patients that we will not agree to participate in this shameful program. What BCBS-FL is doing has been devastating to our patients and families – many who have been under our care for years.

BCBS-FL will be instituting their plan on December 1. I am writing to ask for your help in stopping them from moving ahead with these deplorable actions. If a thorough examination determines that BCBS-FL has, in fact, found a way to circumvent the law, I ask for your help in revising the interim rules to block the loopholes they are exploiting.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this serious matter.

With highest regard,

Michael R Johnson MD