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May 22, 2018

The Honorable Stephen A. Huffman, Chair
House Health Committee
77. S. High Street - 12th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Chairman Huffman:

On behalf of the 5,000 members of the Ohio Academy of Family Physicians, I write to strongly oppose Sub. HB 326, a bill that would allow certain psychologists to prescribe psychotropic and other drugs for treatment of mental illness and drug addiction.

These medications are dangerous and potentially harmful if not prescribed and utilized correctly. The current generation medications used to treat mental illnesses are potent, powerful modifiers of brain chemistry. They also affect other organ systems and interact with other medications. An example - Zyprexa is used to treat bipolar disorder, but it can also cause patients to develop diabetes.

Can a psychologist take a medical history? Do a physical exam, create a differential diagnosis for a presenting complaint (e.g. nausea, palpitations, weight loss), order appropriate diagnostic studies, and interpret the results - then refine their assessment and make a plan for managing the symptom? Fifty percent of patients with mental illness are on additional medications to treat other medical illnesses. Does the limited pharmacology training of a psychologist proposed by this bill give them sufficient knowledge to understand interactions of antidepressant medications with other drugs?

Psychologists are social scientists. Their training occurs largely outside of a medical context. A psychologist possesses an academic degree, such as a PhD, but not a medical degree. Psychologists are trained to assess behavioral and cognitive changes. To be licensed as a physician, a person must have more than 4,000 classroom hours of medical school and at least three years of residency. The training that would be required for a psychologist certification—by the Board of Psychology, not the Board of Medicine— involves only a fraction of the medical school classroom hours.

Physicians have lengthy instruction in medical school in pharmacology that builds on their early courses in biochemistry, physiology, immunology, and molecular biology, and creates a bridge to clinical medicine and the treatment of disease. They learn how drugs affect the body, factors that deal with metabolism, distribution and excretion, and many variables that influence how a medication is influenced by genetics, race, other diseases and other drugs.



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Family physicians sincerely value the professional abilities of psychologists, and work collaboratively with them to treat patients who suffer from mental disorders, but psychologists do not have the medical training necessary for them to safely prescribe medication. Expanding the scope of practice for psychologists to prescribe jeopardizes the safety of Ohio's citizens.

Please oppose Sub. HB 326. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Donald O. Mack, MD
President

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