



Wisconsin Psychiatric Association Talking Points Scope of Practice

General:

- Giving psychologists the right to prescribe psychiatric medications puts patients at risk.
- Patients and families struggling with mental illnesses will be subjected to substandard care.

Differences between Psychiatrists and Psychologists:

- Psychologists are not medical doctors and will not be required to get the training necessary to safely prescribe potent medications.
- Psychiatrists are medical doctors with 12 or more years of medical training in biology, anatomy, chemistry, and the other sciences, plus clinical training to diagnose disease and prescribe medications to treat illnesses.
- Psychiatrists have extensive, specialized post-graduate training in the treatment of mental illness and substance use disorders.
- Psychologists, like social workers, mental health counselors, and marriage and family therapists, should be proud of their training in human behavior, but they do not have the basic medical education and supervised post-graduate training necessary to prescribe medication safely and effectively.
- Clinical psychologists are not medically trained and have not gone to medical school. Changing the law will not qualify psychologists to prescribe medications.
- The issue of psychologist prescribing is divisive within the profession of psychology. Many psychologists oppose prescription privileges for psychologists.

Training:

- A crash course in prescribing cannot substitute for the comprehensive knowledge and skills physicians achieve through medical education and rigorous clinical experience.
- Non-physician professionals who do prescribe (e.g., nurse practitioners, physician assistants, podiatrists, and dentists) all have medical training.
- Appropriate venues already exist for psychologists who wish to prescribe to obtain the training necessary to do so. For example, some Wisconsin psychologists have decided to go to medical school or obtain medical training to become a nurse practitioner or physician assistant so as to be able to prescribe.

Psychiatric Medications:

- Psychiatric medications are among the most powerful available to modern medicine. They don't just affect the brain; they affect the entire body.
- Psychiatric medications are highly effective in treating serious mental illness, but if not appropriately prescribed and monitored, they can result in more severe illness or death.
- Psychiatric medications' potentially disabling and deadly side effects include: seizures, heart arrhythmias, blood diseases, kidney damage, diabetes, tardive dyskinesia (permanent, involuntary movement disorder), liver failure, neuroleptic malignant syndrome (25-50% fatal), severe high or low blood pressure, coma, and stroke.
- Monitoring for psychiatric medication side effects requires extensive skill and experience in interpreting laboratory studies, EKGs, brain scans, and other studies, and in performing physical examinations.
- Psychiatric medications interact with many other medications, psychiatric or not.
- Psychiatrists often need to medically treat the side effects of psychiatric medications with non-psychiatric medications.
- Psychiatrists prescribe not only psychiatric medications but also many other medications used for other disorders involving the heart, kidneys, thyroid, and reproductive system.
- Knowing when not to prescribe is as important as knowing when to prescribe.

Patient Safety is at Risk:

- Mental illnesses are real, diagnosable, and treatable.
- Psychologists are asking for the right to practice medicine without going to medical school. That's dangerous for patient safety.
- Often, patients with mental illness also have other serious medical complications. Without a medical background, psychologists could miss potentially fatal medical conditions. Psychiatrists have the medical training to treat patients as a whole, not just from the neck up.
- Psychiatrists always need to consider physical causes of psychiatric symptoms before powerful psychiatric medications should be prescribed. This requires extensive medical training to know how to evaluate for brain tumors, multiple sclerosis, seizures, Parkinson's Disease, Alzheimer's Disease, thyroid disorders, lupus, and other diseases that can resemble psychiatric disorders. Psychologists do not receive this medical training.
- Medically competent podiatrists, optometrists, and dentists prescribe, but these health care providers undergo a medical education. In each of these cases, licensing requires significantly more medical education and training than that proposed by psychologists for themselves.
- Patients with mental illnesses have the right to be treated by the best-qualified professional.
- Attempts to lower costs should never lower the quality of care.
- Psychologist prescribing bills have been consistently defeated in 20 states since 1985, largely because of patient safety concerns.

Cost of Care:

- Psychologist prescribing will increase health care costs.
- Prescribing psychologists will pay higher liability insurance fees. These higher practice costs will be passed on to patients who will pay higher fees for a lower standard of care.
- Facilities such as hospitals must also cover the increased liability in the event of patients injured by prescribing psychologists, further driving up the cost of medical care.

- Given the complexity of psychiatric patient needs, psychologist collaboration with medical doctors will be necessary and will drive up costs.

Access to Care:

- This legislation is promoted as a way to provide greater access to care in rural areas. However, psychologists are not geographically situated to serve rural populations any better than psychiatrists.
- In the states in which psychologist prescribing has been legalized, patients do not have better access. Few psychologists have actually pursued prescribing privileges.
- The needs of under-served areas can best be met by improving the mental health training of general physicians and other medically trained practitioners who are more widely distributed than psychiatrists. Other solutions include collaboration with primary care physicians and telepsychiatry.
- Americans have the best medical care available in the world today. We should strive to make this care available to everyone, and not force patients, especially poor, elderly, and those in rural areas, to settle for substandard care.
- High-quality and cost-effective treatment of mental illnesses is best provided via collaboration between psychologists and physicians.