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The Honourable Deb Matthews, Ph.D.  
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care  
Government of Ontario  
80 Grosvenor Street, 10th Floor  
Toronto, ON M7A 1N8

RE: Prescriptive authority for specially trained psychologists

Dear Dr. Matthews:

I am writing to urge your support for legislation that would provide prescriptive authority for specially trained licensed psychologists. I am sure by now you have heard just about all of the pros and cons. So, what I hope to do is provide some information regarding how psychologists with prescriptive authority have been very beneficial to the people of Louisiana. In considering this legislation, I would respectfully offer you information from perhaps a little different perspective, a medical psychologist who has had prescriptive authority for the past eight years.

In May of 2004, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco signed into law a statute allowing specially trained psychologists, *medical psychologists*, to prescribe psychotropic medications. Since that time, medical psychologists have been providing mental health services that have included psychotherapy *and* prescribing appropriate psychotropic medications. Several months following initial passage of this statute, as a fledgling prescribing profession, this special training was put to the test when several medical psychologists volunteered their newly granted prescriptive authority aiding victims of the disasters hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Since passage of the Louisiana statute and during such an unusual beginning almost 8 years ago, medical psychologists have been safe and effective prescribers in a variety of health care settings in Louisiana.

While there are other professions that do have some training in pharmacology, there is no other mental health profession that has a master's degree in psychopharmacology, in addition to the doctoral degree, as a requisite to prescribe.

Medical psychologists have indeed been a “one stop shop,” as was predicted. Licensed psychologists already have the expertise and authority to diagnose and treat mental illnesses with a variety of techniques. By adding the ability to prescribe psychotropic medications, medical psychologists are able to fit the treatment modality to the needs of the patient rather than forcing the patient’s needs into only a single treatment modality available to some providers.

Over the years, medical psychologists and physicians in Louisiana have continued to work closely together, increasing access to quality mental health care. In a collaborative effort, physicians and medical psychologists recently moved the authority for regulating medical psychologists under the Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners. This was accomplished due to an amazing growing spirit of cooperation between the Louisiana Academy of Medical Psychology and the Board of Medical Examiners. In fact, I currently sit on the Medical Psychology Advisory Committee to the Board of *Medical* Examiners. Many physicians and medical psychologists across the state are cooperating in the spirit of providing the best possible mental health services to the citizens of Louisiana. It is working and has been working well.

Ontario’s experience may not be unlike many states in the United States in that the recruitment and retention of psychiatrists is difficult to say the least. With psychiatrists being trained in fewer numbers, it will be even more difficult to find culturally sensitive psychiatrists. With the addition of medical psychologists, many positions for psychiatrists that have remained vacant for years are now being filled at much less cost to the State. Medical psychologists in Louisiana are filling positions in State psychiatric hospitals and community mental health centers around the state, and they have been using prescriptive authority in a safe and effective manner. Wait times for appointments with psychiatrists have been problematic, creating access problems in both rural and urban areas. Medical psychologists certainly have not been *the* answer to access problems. But, medical psychologists have been *one* answer to access problems. Yet, medical psychologists have not put one licensed psychologist or one psychiatrist out of business in Louisiana. Unfortunately, there is plenty “business” available.

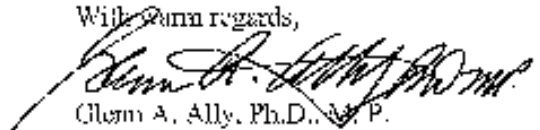
I have also been a board member of the Louisiana State Board of Examiners of Psychologists, and I can say, as a matter of certainty, that since 2004, when medical psychologists acquired prescriptive authority, there has not been a single complaint against a medical psychologist as a result of exercising prescriptive authority. In fact, my experience on the national level informs me that there has not been a single complaint against a psychologist exercising prescriptive authority since psychologists have been granted prescriptive authority, more than 20 years ago. That data includes psychologists with prescriptive authority in the Department of Defense Demonstration Project, in all branches of our US military, in Indian Health Services, in New Mexico and in Louisiana. Specially trained psychologists are indeed safe prescribers.

Dr. Matthews, no one wants to make a decision that they will later regret. I can assure you that the decision to support this type of legislation will not be one of those decisions. It will, in effect, increase access to proven, safe, quality mental health care for the

citizens of Ontario. I would respectfully urge your support for such legislation when introduced in Ontario.

I thank you for your attention and your consideration.

With warm regards,



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