

Clinicians, Clients, and Insurers: Partners through Change in Mental Health Services



WASHINGTON STATE COALITION OF
MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AND CONSUMERS

Advocates for Ethical Mental Health Care

www.wacoalition.org

Fall 2012

WAMHTP and You: Protecting Mental Health Parity

by Laura Groshong, LICSW, Coalition Lobbyist

For the past year the Washington Association for Mental Health Treatment Protection (WAMHTP) has been working for all Coalition members to keep patient mental health benefits strong. But wait, you may be saying, wasn't there ANOTHER organization or two which had that mission? In fact, WAMHTP has had four names in its

brief history, as the organization evolved. What started out as a task force to deal exclusively with Regence Blueshield then became a task force to address restrictions placed on mental health benefits by all major insurers. Then as we prepared to become incorporated as a non-profit organization, we hoped to use the

designation of Partnership, conveying the fact that we were composed of many individual organizations. Alas, in its wisdom, the Department of Licensing does not allow non-profit organizations to use the term "partnership" in a title. Thus we settled on the new and final name of the group, now an association, which is registered as a non-profit

group in Washington and has applied to become a 501(c)(3) in federal tax codes.

Now that you have the history of the group, here is what WAMHTP has accomplished:

1. Developed a website that will go 'live' shortly;
2. Collected \$7,030,

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SAVE THE DATE



"I Googled You!"

Laura W. Groshong, LICSW
UW School of Social Work,
Seattle

6 Ethics CEU Hours
Available

www.wacoalition.org

Save the Date

"I Googled You!"

Staying Clinically Focused in an Online World

Friday, September 28
7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Saturday, September 29
9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Laura W. Groshong,
LICSW

UW School of Social
Work, Seattle

6 Ethics CEU Hours
Available

[Click Here for Brochure](#)

From the Chair

Hello Coalition Members,
This is our first "green" newsletter! We hope you are all enjoying the ease of reading this newsletter at your leisure online!

Speaking of online, there are important details about our upcoming event "I Googled You: Staying Clinically Centered in an Online World" in this newsletter (don't miss it- Sept 28 eve and 29 day). A great way to get some ethics credits.

More plans for this fall include bringing back the

Sue Wiedenfeld, PhD
President

"Frugal Practitioner", which was so well received a couple of years ago. This panel offered clinicians a great opportunity to share their favorite ways to save money/reduce costs in their practices. Watch for more information.

The Coalition is an organization that includes all mental health professionals in Washington, but it is unique in that it includes consumers as well. At a

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CONTACT US

Email:
wacoalition@frontier.com
 Website:
www.wacoalition.org

Join the Coalition Dues

Member	\$65
Student	\$15
Consumer	Free

with \$10,000 more promised, to cover the expenses, which include hiring an attorney, setting up the website, future hiring of expert witnesses, and travel for Sue Wiedenfeld, Vice-Chair, and me to the federal parity hearing in Los Angeles next month to testify;

3. Hired Ele Hamburger, JD, who has won 10 cases that violated parts of the state mental health parity law;

4. Developed a list of restrictions that include use of Milliman Guidelines, restriction by diagnosis, length of treatment, and frequency of treatment;

5. Worked with legislators to create a mental health parity hearing that would make insurers explain how the restrictions being placed on mental health parity benefits are in compliance with our parity law;

6. Been in discussion with the Insurance Commissioner about the potential violations of mental health parity laws;

7. Collected 169 cases of denials of mental health treatment, one of which will be the case used in legal action; and

8. Developed materials on how clinicians and patients can file appeals when treatment is denied.

While much remains to be done, we hope all Coalition members will consider making a donation to support this important group. WAMHTP is entirely in agreement with the mission of the Coalition.

The other eight groups that make up WAMHTP are working with the Coalition to present a broad-based mental health community approach to the problems that we face in making mental health parity a true reality.

Watch for information on www.wacoalition.org, the state hearing, and legal

action over the next one to two months, and give WAMHTP your support! ◇



We're Going GREEN!

Dear Coalition Members,

We have moved to an all electronic version of our newsletter. This will help us save valuable resources—financial and environmental! Although many of our members voiced a preference for this format, we will continue to send out a paper version of the newsletter, if requested.



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Newsletter

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 Publisher The Word Shop

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 Health Professionals and Consumers

Washington mental health clinicians had high hopes that full implementation of the mental health parity laws in July 2010, would resolve the unfair limitations on mental health care that our patients have struggled with for decades.

Instead, as any clinician who receives insurance reimbursement knows, mental health treatment has been increasingly restricted over the past year by frequency of sessions, length of treatment, covered diagnoses, and reimbursement rates.

It is more important than ever to elect legislators who will pass laws that require insurers to follow our excellent parity laws and put clinical decision-making back in the hands of mental health practitioners.

The MH-PAC has been a registered political action committee since 2000 and has distributed more than \$40,000 to state legislative candidates who support ethical mental health treatment during the past 11 years. Endorsement decisions are made according to the questionnaires that state legislative candidates return; no candidate who has never returned a questionnaire will be

endorsed. Endorsements and contributions are based on 1) candidates who have been supporters of MH-PAC goals in the past; 2) candidates who are supporters of MH-PAC goals and in need of financial support; and 3) candidates who have a reasonable chance of winning their election.

A group of six of us have worked in the past few months sending out questionnaires to selected candidates and carefully looking at their answers. We made decisions to endorse ("we deem you a friend of mental health goals") and contributions ("we want to give you money for your campaign so we can continue to work with you").

We still are collecting your donations as the primary is over and the general election is coming. Our candidates will still need our support, and they do appreciate it. Whether it is for a contribution or a letter of endorsement, many send emails back to say "I am proud to be a mental health supporter," "You made my day with your letter of support," and "I am so glad I have earned your respect."

MH-PAC is proud of its record over the past 12 years with 90% of our

Got mental health parity??



Not so much.

endorsed candidates winning election, and distribution of more than \$40,000. We have heard from many candidates how much they appreciated our support, and we know that their efforts have made a difference in passing mental health parity and protecting public funding of mental health services.

Implementation of parity needs more work. Give MH-PAC a chance to keep electing legislators that will support our goals.

[Click Here for Donation Form](#)

PS: We have collected and distributed more than \$4000 in the past four months! Thanks for helping us help the candidates who support the mental health needs of individuals in our state. You can check our website,

www.wacoalition.org

for a complete listing of endorsements (coming soon). ◇

MH-PAC
a political action committee
affiliated with
Washington State
Coalition of
Mental Health
Professionals
and Consumers

Back by Popular Demand

The Frugal Practitioner

a lively panel presentation of tried-and-true tips and suggestions to help keep your practice running effectively and profitably!

Date to be announced!

IF YOU ARE NOT GETTING E-MAILS ABOUT OUR EVENTS, please E-mail us with your CURRENT E-mail address: wacoalition@frontier.com. This is the best way to get Coalition news.

Letters

*Dear Seasoned Therapist,
With all the denials and changes surrounding insurance reimbursement, I'm confused! What do I do when my client's claims are denied? Do I stop treatment? Do I file an appeal? I do need to be paid, AND I want to do the right thing.*

Filing an appeal sounds awfully complicated, time consuming, and uncertain. I'm also worried the insurance company might kick me off the panel if I make a fuss.

Insurance Denial Freak Out

Dear Freak Out,
What a timely letter! This is a topic the Coalition has been thinking about—

hard. I think many of us are ambivalent about getting involved in this process. Unfortunately, without our writing appeals and explaining our position, we become victims of the insurance company policies, rather than partners in the process.

First, let me reassure you that you do have lots of support in this process. In this newsletter issue, Laura Groshong has written an excellent article explaining the whole appeal process and how to write an appeal. In addition, Ele Hamburger, JD (from the law firm of Sirianni, Youlz, and Spoonemore) is available for free consultation (206-223-0303).

Because these appeals will be an important part of the class action suit she is putting together, she has a strong interest in helping clinicians go through the process. By going through the appeal process, we are documenting and clarifying how the insurance companies are making their decisions. Our efforts are essential to exposing the underbelly of

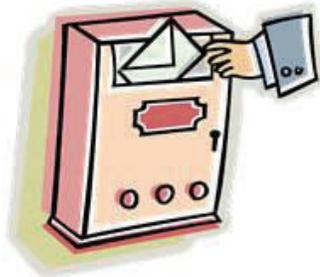
how mental health care is allocated and paid for. Not to appeal means we accept the insurance underwriters' definition of medically necessary mental health treatment.

It is a lengthy process, and you won't get paid until it is over. However, the process can be integrated into treatment and may in fact strengthen a client's commitment to his/her mental health care. Together you can clarify the necessity and value of the treatment. Whether or not you have an ethical obligation to appeal is debatable and probably depends on the needs and situation of the client.

Filing an appeal is definitely not grounds for being removed from an insurance panel. You are following a standard administrative procedure. If this happens, please let us know!

Hope this addresses your concerns. The Coalition is committed to supporting all clinicians' efforts in filing appeals.

Yours,
The Seasoned Therapist ◇



Have a practice question?
Let us know!

From the Chair, continued from page 1

recent Coalition Board meeting we decided to increase our outreach to consumers. You will read more in this issue about efforts toward a class action suit by the Washington Association for Mental Health Treatment Protection. It will be helpful to everyone to know about their rights and current activities in Washington State related to mental

health. From this newsletter forward, we plan to have a portion of the newsletter specifically targeted to consumer readers.

In addition, we have recently developed a flyer for clinician waiting rooms to recruit more consumers to the Coalition. Some providers have been handing them out to new clients, others have stocked their waiting rooms. Please

download the flyer here and make them available to clients in your waiting room ([link to flyer](#)). It is our goal to strengthen the communication between providers and consumers related to mental health treatment. This is a start.

Join us at the end of September and get your ethics credits out of the way. See you then. ◇

Member Profile

Hello! My name is Cynthia Stover. I have been Treasurer of the Coalition and a board member since 2003. I was drawn into the Coalition through a dear friend, Laura Groshong, who acts as our lobbyist. She knew of a wonderful organization that had need of a Treasurer.

I have a degree in accounting and finance from the University of Southern California (Fight On!) and an MBA from Pepperdine University. I have worked in both the public and private side of accounting. As you can probably tell from my schooling, I grew up in Southern California.

My husband Miles, who I met at USC, is a

turnaround specialist, bankruptcy court trustee and superior court receiver for companies in difficulty. We have two businesses that work with underperforming companies. Unfortunately, with the economy over the last few years, we have been dealing with bankruptcies and liquidations a whole lot more than turnarounds.

We have two terrific sons, Christopher and Matthew, and one canine family member, Lucky. Fortunately, both our boys have stayed in the Northwest and we get to see them weekly.

We moved to Washington in 1991. We love the trees and, yes, even the rain. We have

lived in Gig Harbor for the last 13 years and love it! We enjoy traveling, reading, hiking and riding our Harleys.

I have learned so much about the mental health field, ethical mental health treatment, and the challenges that face our members. It has been a treat working with this board.

I hope you take the opportunity to get involved with the Coalition by attending our various presentations, volunteering for an event, or perhaps even becoming a board member.

Warmly,
Cynthia ♦

RENEW YOUR
COALITION
MEMBERSHIP ONLINE

[http://
www.wacoalition.org/
renew.html](http://www.wacoalition.org/renew.html)



Who Ya Gonna Call !?!?!?!?
Coalition Helpline: 206-444-4304
Who's My Legislator: 1-800-448-4881
(State and Federal)
Legislative Hotline: 1-100-562-6000

Update your E-mail and postal addresses by using this form
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OK to publish information in the Directory and on Website? Yes _____ No _____

Willing to help with specific tasks? Yes _____

Consumers' Corner

Welcome to the section in our newsletter dedicated to you, our patients and clients. Each newsletter will address topics from the consumer's perspective.

Did you know that insurers are required to give you information regarding your plan's mental health services?



1. "What are the steps that must be taken to have mental health services paid for by my plan?"
 - a. Direct self-referral
 - b. Primary care provider referral required
 - c. Pre-authorization by phone
2. "What information about my mental condition will anyone other than my mental health provider see?"
 - a. No information other than your diagnosis
 - b. Brief summary of emotional difficulties
 - c. Complete medical treatment
3. "Do I have to pay more than the co-pay, deductible and other charges for my other covered medical services to get mental health services?"
 - a. Deductibles: same, less, more
 - b. Co-pays: same, less, more
4. "What is the maximum number of medically necessary in-patient days and out-patient visits I can get each year under this plan?"
5. "What is the average number of outpatient visits this plan pays per person seeking these services?"
6. "In which of the following circumstances where I might need

mental health services would I find them excluded or subject to restrictions or limitations other than medical necessity?"

- a. Psychological testing
 - b. Mental disorder with a physical basis, such as Tourette's Syndrome
 - c. Court ordered treatment
 - d. Self-inflicted harm (suicide attempt)
 - e. Learning disorders
 - f. Eating disorders
 - g. Sexual dysfunction
 - h. Couples therapy
 - i. Marriage therapy
 - j. Child therapy
 - k. Institutional care
7. "How soon after requesting mental health treatment should I expect to receive my first treatment visit in non-emergency circumstances?"

As the "Seasoned Therapist" stated in her letter on page 4, our goal is to be *partners in the process of your mental health treatment* rather than *victims of insurance company policies*. Are you concerned about limits on access to mental health care, limits to coverage? Do you feel mental health is not being treated on par with medical conditions? We encourage you to join the Coalition at no cost and be a consumer voice in the national conversation about mental health benefits. As a member of the Coalition, you will be informed about important policy changes and decisions related to parity implantation. You will also help further define and educate the public about quality mental health. Join today, it's free! www.wacoalition.org

Coalition members and friends!

Renew your membership today! Keep yourself up to date regarding changes in mental health related to health care reform, and state issues like the changes in the Uniform Medical Plan. Read the several articles in this newsletter about these topics. Don't miss a future newsletter! This is a time when you will want to track what the Coalition is doing to preserve and protect quality psychotherapy.

Invite a friend to join the Coalition. Forward the on-line newsletter that describes what we do. Remember, the Coalition represents all disciplines. **More members strengthen our message.** ◇

RENEW TODAY!!

Be sure to give us all your information so we can update our membership for the new directory.
Renewal form,
page 8

“I Googled You!”

Staying Clinically Focused in an Online World

University of Washington
School of Social Work

6 Ethics CEU Hours Available



Laura Groshong

On September 28 and 29, Ms. Laura Groshong, LICSW, will speak on a topic that is becoming increasingly more controversial. Almost everyone in the world today, including mental health professionals, has some kind of online identity. Mindful crafting of these identities is crucial to developing solid treatment relationships in which treatment boundaries are maintained. An awareness of the meaning of Internet communication with clients is also necessary. What has become to be known as “social media,” or websites that allow people to discuss in varying details their personal and public lives, has changed the world.

Mental health professionals need to be as mindful as possible about the impact their Internet identities can have upon

their clinical work. Your online presence is a form of self-disclosure and a responsibility all clinicians need to consider.

The conference objectives are to:

- Provide an overview of professional and personal websites and the possible impact on treatment
- Review meanings and possible complications of Internet communication between clients and clinicians
- Apply codes of ethics, state and federal laws/rules concerning patient privacy to the use of the Internet regarding finding of information about clients and clinicians and as a

means of communication.

Ms. Groshong is a dynamic speaker, experienced clinician, and author with more than 32 years of experience. Since 1996, as a Registered Lobbyist, she has been our eyes and ears in Olympia, representing eight mental health groups. She has been instrumental in passing several bills promoting access to mental health treatment.

Please join us at the University of Washington School of Social Work for this timely event! There will be a discussion on clinical issues on Friday, September 28, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. The conference will be on Saturday, September 29, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m..

For More Information

http://www.wacoalition.org/ethics_conf_brochure-050612.pdf

Register Online

www.wsscs.org

The Coalition represents a multidisciplinary group of professionals and consumers addressing a broad range of mental health needs in children, adolescents, and adults. Our Board is equally diverse. Board members have included psychiatrists, psychologists, MFTs, LCSW, LMHC, and other professionals. They also bring a wide range of experience and special interests which serve to broaden the knowledge base of our members, such as skills with special populations, use of the Internet, and understanding of legal and ethical issues associated with mental health. From time to time, we have a need to replace a board member.

Are you interested in:

- Preserving choice, confidentiality, integrity, and quality in our mental health

services?

- Lobbying to educate legislators about quality mental health care?
- Educating and supporting mental health professionals and consumers?
- Influencing political and insurance industry policy to include mental health as a vital component of health care?
- Empowering mental health consumers to influence health care reform?

If so, please consider becoming a member of the Coalition board! No pay but great rewards! Please contact Sue Wiedenfeld, Coalition Chair, swiedenfeld@me.com.



It's Time to Renew Your Membership

The Coalition

of Mental Health Professionals and Consumers

P. O. Box 30087 • Seattle, Washington 98113-2087

206-444-4304 • <http://www.wacoalition.org>

Your dues support the Coalition's efforts to preserve ethical mental health treatment. Your dues also provide funding that supports legislative efforts, continuing education programs, our website, a Helpline, the newsletter, brochures, and our on-line member directory.

Thank you for your continued support! It makes possible what we do. Please renew promptly. With this year's renewal, you will be included in our on-line directory.

Send this form to:

THE COALITION, ATTN: MEMBERSHIP

P. O. Box 30087 • Seattle, WA 98113-2087

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- ___ Anxiety/Depression
- ___ Bipolar
- ___ Grief and Loss
- ___ LBGTQ
- ___ Learning Issue
- ___ Medical Issues/Pain Managements
- ___ PTSD
- ___ Relationships
- ___ Stress
- ___ Work/Career

SPECIALTIES

- ___ Elders
- ___ Adults
- ___ Adolescents
- ___ Children
- ___ Infants
- ___ Family
- ___ Couples

PREFERRED TREATMENTS

- ___ Psychoanalytic
- ___ Cognitive-Behavioral
- ___ Interpersonal
- ___ Eclectic
- ___ EMDR
- ___ Somatic Transformation

___ Please check if you **do not want** to be included in the directory

___ Please check if you are willing to volunteer for the Coalition

___ occasional time-limited tasks

___ I will help with political efforts

___ ask me about other needs you have

___ I will help with newsletter or membership (circle)

Legislative District: WA: _____ National: _____ Don't know? Call 1-800-448-4881

I/WE can support the Coalition at the following level:

Professional Membership:

___ \$65 ___ \$115 ___ \$250

Student Membership:

___ \$15 ___ \$25 ___ \$65

Consumer Membership: FREE!

Renew Online at <http://www.wacoalition.org/renew.html>

THANK YOU for supporting **THE COALITION**

The Coalition of Mental Health
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