Prescriptive Privileges for Psychologists (RxP)
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Abstract

Since 1990, psychologists have made significant efforts to gain prescriptive authority. By gaining prescription-writing privileges (RxP), psychologists contend they would improve quality of mental health care, increase access to care in underserved areas, and help control costs.

Workforce shortages are clearly a problem in the mental health field and access to care is limited in rural areas. However, psychologists are found where psychiatrists practice – in urban areas - the location of best reimbursements. Rural residents have comparable rates of insurance as urban residents, but have less comprehensive coverage. Because cost of care is a major barrier, treatment combining medication and psychotherapy is usually not an option for people in rural areas.

The major concern over RxP is lack of consensus about what constitutes an adequate training program. Stakeholders against RxP feel it is in the patients’ best interest to restrict psychotropic medication prescribing to the medical doctors. There is no demonstrated health care need that warrants granting psychologists prescribing authority. While there is room for improvement in diagnosis of mental and substance abuse issues by primary care physicians, and a contentious debate on the safety of psychologists prescribing psychotropics, my recommendation is that a mutual consultative and collaborative relationship between psychologists and physicians offers a wiser solution without duplication of prescriptive authority or loss of psychotherapy benefits.