

An Update from the OPA President

Fellow OPA Colleagues, this is my initial opportunity to write a newsletter article as President of our organization. As you are aware, the past three months has been one with several significant events. First was the resignation of Dr. Rick Walton from the OPA board quickly followed by our Past President Gail Poyner and our President Jennifer Sweeton. None of these were anticipated and the entire OPA board was surprised at these events. We all expressed our deep regrets at their departure, and wished them well in their careers and all future endeavors. The board then set the selection of new board members, new President and Past President in accordance with the OPA bylaws.

These events, while slowing down many of the organization's objectives for 2017, the primary goals for the year have been not derailed. Our legislative agenda is on track, and our efforts to defend recent gains in building relationships with the Oklahoma Legislature have been significant. Further, several board members, to include our Executive Director and our Early Career Psychologist attended the annual APAPO Professional Leadership Conference in Washington, D.C. in early March where we visited the offices of the entire Oklahoma Congressional Delegation. While in D.C. we spoke with members of the congressional staffs on the need to maintain the gains that Psychology achieved in recently passed federal legislation to include Wellstone-Domenici and the Affordable Care Act (ACA). It was widely accepted at that time that the US House of Representatives would pass a bill replacing either in full or in part the ACA, so we emphasized the need to maintain parity and access to behavioral medical treatment as an integral part of any legislation sent to the US Senate. The second major ask of our Congressional delegation visit was to ask our Congressional members to pass legislation permitting psychologists' to directly bill Medicare without supervision by an MD or DO. This legislation is needed as under federal guidelines Psychologists' are not defined as "physicians" and thus cannot practice to the full extent of our independent licenses. Our five members of the House of Representatives and two Senators anticipate improving communications with OPA and its members as well as building a vibrant working relationship where OPA can work in concert with our Congressional delegation to improve access to behavioral medical treatment for all Oklahomans. However, all of the Oklahoma delegations appeared to be dedicated to the repeal and replacement of the ACA. They did indicate however, that they would work to inform OPA of their legislative actions and plans. OPA did and will continue to provide updates on communications from our Congressional Delegation via the OPA Listserv. The OPA board does realize that not all positions of our Congressional Delegation reflect the position of OPA or its

members however, we do have the intent and feel obligated to keep all our members informed as to their actions as it relates to health issues, especially given our annual trip to D.C. with APA and APAPO.

Also of major interest to OPA is the definition of “physician” under Title 49 of the Oklahoma Statutes. Oklahoma psychologists’ are the only doctoral level medical providers not defined as “physicians” while chiropractors, dentist, and podiatrist are so defined. The failure to be included impacts Oklahoma Psychologists’ in obtaining full medical staff privileges at hospitals and delivering services to the full scope of their knowledge, skills, and abilities. A bill was introduced last legislative session to correct this problem but did not move out of Committee and it is planned to have it reintroduced next legislative session.

It may seem that OPA is engaged in many political activities and this is true. We have a lobbyist to assist our Executive Director and we supplement this with our Psychologist of the Day program at the Oklahoma Legislature when in session. While OPA can within the state and federal statutes address issues related to health, we do track and engage on these issues and often request that you contact your federal and state legislators concerning issues so related. I cannot over stress the importance of the APAPO and OPA action alerts as this is how we can have an impact on pending legislative actions and build better relationship with the US Congressional and State legislative delegations.

Let me close by stressing the importance of increasing our membership, if you know of a colleague in your office or socially or at church, synagogue or mosque, please talk to them about OPA and the importance of their membership in building a strong professional organization that helps to provide continuing education, and assistance with protecting our licenses and building a professional reputation through which we protect not only our profession but assist in gaining access to behavioral medical care for all Oklahomans. OPA has not had a dues increase in nearly a decade and during this time economist state the real rate of inflation as measured by the price of gold has doubled. However, there has not been a corresponding increase in membership dues. To continue providing the services that OPA does, we need additional members or a dues increase. And YOU, our member, can help us with keeping dues the same by RECRUITING members into OPA. OPA must rely significantly on grants from APA’s CAPP of a significant portion, however we must get stronger financially and YOU as a member can make a huge impact. I believe that the services provided by OPA are significant, so it is my desire to increase members in lieu of a dues increase.

I said I would do my best to keep this message short, I hope to see and meet all of you on November 2nd and 3rd at the OPA annual convention.

Thank you,

Gilbert O. Sanders, EdD, ABMP