Mental Health

Support legislative efforts to provide resources for patients with mental illness and stop the practice of boarding psychiatric patients in the Emergency Department.

For years, state support for mental health resources has been on the decline and services for psychiatric patients in the United States are simply inadequate. As a result of this diminishing support, psychiatric patients are more and more often turning to emergency departments for their acute care needs. Unfortunately, it takes three times as long to find an inpatient bed for a psychiatric patient rather than a medical patient after the decision to admit has been made. These psychiatric patients require more physician, nurse and hospital resources than other patients and, thus, diminish our ability to evaluate and treat other medical patients who are awaiting emergency care services.

The prevalence of mental illness in this country, combined with a lack of resources to care for these individuals in the most appropriate setting, is a national crisis. Systemic changes are needed in the way individuals with mental illness are cared for in this country.

ACEP is calling on Congress to help ensure resources are made available to conduct vitally needed research on this issue and to fund additional inpatient and outpatient treatment beds with the corresponding professional staff. Most importantly, we must work together to help mental health patients avoid reaching a crisis point, which would require acute emergency department services, in the first place.

ACEP supports legislative initiatives that will:

- Improve research, data collection and efficacy of existing mental health programs;
- Promote evidence-based medicine to create systems of care for patients with mental illness;
- Provide training for emergency medical and law enforcement personnel to recognize individuals with mental health issues and how to intervene;
- Remove regulations that currently prohibit the same-day billing under Medicaid for treatment of physical and mental health for the same patient, in the same location, on the same day;
- Ameliorate the Medicaid Institutes for Mental Disease (IMD) exclusion by giving states the option to receive federal matching payments for care of adult patients with mental illness; and
- Establish federal liability protections for health professionals who volunteer at community health centers or behavioral health centers.

ACEP anticipates legislation will soon be reintroduced in the House by Representatives Tim Murphy (R-PA) and Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), as well as introduced in the Senate by Senators Chris Murphy (D-CT) and Bill Cassidy (R-LA). These measures are expected to contain these, or similar, provisions. ACEP endorsed Rep. Murphy’s mental health bill (H.R. 3717) in the previous Congress.

Please contact ACEP’s Congressional Affairs Director Brad Gruehn at bgruehn@acep.org or (202) 262-2090 for more information.