



**Pennsylvania
Psychiatric Society**

*The Pennsylvania
District Branch of the
American Psychiatric Association*

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Dear PaPS Member:

As we all know, there is a shortage of psychiatrists in many areas of Pennsylvania, particularly for patients needing specialized treatment, such as children and adolescents. The problem is influenced by a variety of causes, and finding long-term solutions will take time. Meanwhile, primary care physicians do their best to fill the gap, but too many people are going without the psychiatric care they need. You can help alleviate the situation.

How? By joining our Outreach Consultation Project, developed to provide *pro bono*, informal consultation services to primary care physicians struggling to find appropriate care for their patients. The program gives us, as psychiatrists, a chance to share our knowledge and expertise in a way that will benefit both patients and our medical colleagues as well.

The information enclosed explains the program in detail and should answer your questions. We understand that you are busy, so we have designed the program to require only your occasional attention. Your involvement, while minimal, could have a substantial effect on others. We plan to market this program to primary care physicians in September. It is important that we have an adequate list of participants by that time, so please take a few moments to review the information now. You may sign up at any time, but making a commitment now will help ensure the program's success. If you have any questions, or would like to discuss the project in more detail, please feel free to contact the Society staff at 800-422-2900.

The Outreach Consultation Project has the potential to provide real help for people in need, in the highest tradition of professionalism – **but we need you to make it work.**

Although the challenges facing physicians in today's world are sometimes discouraging, we believe that the medical profession involves both serious responsibilities and extraordinary privileges. Chief among those privileges is the opportunity to help relieve suffering. The Pennsylvania Psychiatric Society's Outreach Consultation Project provides an easy but effective way to do that. It should also be personally rewarding. Please consider these things as you make your decision. We hope you will join us.

Sincerely,

Barry W. Fisher, MD
President

Jyoti R. Shah, MD, DFAPA
Immediate Past President

Outreach Consultation Project

About the program

In most parts of Pennsylvania, patients do not have easy access to psychiatrists. The problem is most acute in regard to child and adolescent psychiatrists, but in some areas there is a real need for other types of psychiatric expertise – e.g., geriatric, dual-diagnosis, even general adult.

Primary care physicians do their best to handle the challenge, but it is sometimes difficult for them to secure psychiatric evaluations or consultations. Until the supply and distribution of psychiatrists changes, you – as a member of the Pennsylvania Psychiatric Society (PaPS) – can help fill the gap by volunteering to provide informal telephone consultations on a pro bono basis. By doing so, you will help your primary care colleagues, our profession, and – most of all – people who need psychiatric care.

We will develop a list of members who are willing to take consultation phone calls from primary care physicians who need advice about a patient they are treating. We will post the list, including business addresses and phone numbers, on the PaPS website. PCPs will be able to choose consultants by geographic area, sub-specialty, or area of interest. The program will be advertised to all primary care physicians in the state, including internists, family practitioners, and pediatricians.

The success of this program will be measured by the number of patients served. That, in turn, depends on the willingness of PCPs to take the time to use our website and place a call. To an even greater extent, it depends on your willingness to volunteer – and to return those calls. We have designed the program so that it should make minimal demands on your time.

How will it work?

- When you receive a call requesting a consultation, the expectation is that you will return the call within 24 hours. This may involve scheduling a phone call at a later time for a more detailed discussion.
- When answering calls, remember that the primary physician will be making the decisions about diagnosis and treatment. Your role is to assist by sharing your knowledge and experience. For example, you might say, “Based on the information we discussed about this patient, you might consider a diagnosis of a major depressive episode versus bipolar disorder, depressed,” or, “Patients with that symptom constellation, of that age group and weight, typically begin to respond within six weeks of giving daily _____ at ___ mg about 75% of the time. Psychotherapy might also be important.”
- While your role in this program is to assist PCPs in providing timely, appropriate care to their patients by offering your advice and guidance, you always have the option of suggesting a formal psychiatric referral.
- We encourage you to record identifying information for the patient to the extent provided, e.g. initials, date, name of primary care physician, and a brief note on the patient’s history, presenting problem, and case disposition.
- We will provide participants with a brief documentation form for our tracking purposes. Please send it in so we can measure the success of the program.

Liability concerns?

In developing this program we consulted with both legal counsel and insurance carriers regarding liability concerns. Based on their response, we believe most insurance carriers will view these unpaid, informal telephone consultations as part of your everyday, routine practice, just as they now view similar discussions you already have with colleagues.

However, we recommend that you review your policy to check for exclusions, or that you contact your insurance carrier to explain the program and confirm coverage.

The American Professional Agency, Inc. has indicated that “the consultations described in the brochure appear to be a psychiatric service that would be covered as would any other service. If an American Professional Agency, Inc. insured member has any specific questions, they should call us directly.”

PMSLIC cautions their insured physicians to avoid situations, whenever possible, in which they are asked to provide informal consultations due to the liability exposure this presents to the physicians being asked to provide consultation.

If your insurance is provided by your hospital or other employer, you may want to see if the coverage is confined to work performed in the scope of your employment. Even if it is, the policy may still cover your involvement in this PaPS program, and you can ask your employer to confirm this in writing. As noted above, many physicians already engage in similar, informal educational discussions with colleagues about specific clinical presentations.

Additional suggestion

If you know in advance that you will be out of the office for an extended period of time, consider making arrangements with another program participant (listed on our website) to handle any consultation requests while you are away. Be sure that your staff is aware of those arrangements.

Participation agreement

To enroll as a participating psychiatrist in the Pennsylvania Psychiatric Society’s Outreach Consultation Project, please complete the following form. Be sure to provide business contact information only. This information will be included in our list of participants and will be posted on our website at www.papsych.org.

Name

Address (*business address only*)

Address

City, State Zip

County

Phone Number (*business phone only*)

Email Address (*for internal use only*)

Sub-specialty Certification/ Areas of Interest

By enrolling in this program, I understand that the business address and phone number provided above will be posted on the PaPS website. I attest that I have a Pennsylvania medical license in good standing, and will notify PaPS immediately and ask to be removed from the program in the event that my license is suspended or revoked. I understand that PaPS reserves the right to limit the number and array of participants in the program, in its sole discretion.

Signature

Date

Please return the completed form to us by faxing it to 717-558-7841 or mailing to Pennsylvania Psychiatric Society, 777 East Park Dr., PO Box 8820, Harrisburg, PA 17105. Please contact the Society at 800-422-2900 with any questions.



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Outreach Consultation Project – Psychiatrists on Call

Consultation Log

Name of PaPS Member Participant

Informal consultation has been provided to a:

Family Physician Pediatrician Internist

Other

If other, please specify: _____

Name of Primary Care Physician: _____

Date of initial request: _____

Date of consultation: _____

Subject of the call:

Chief complaint:

Recommendation:

Diagnosis:

**For each consultation made, please return completed form to:
Consultation Project
PA Psychiatric Society
PO Box 8820, Harrisburg, PA 17105-8820
Fax 717-558-7841**