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Table of Contents

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CONTENTS

Foreword i

ARTICLES

Addressing Stigma and False Beliefs About Mental Health: A New Direction for Mental Health Parity Advocacy

Claire Sontheimer & Michael R. Ulrich..... 101

Though lawmakers have attempted to legislate for parity between coverage of mental health and substance use disorder (MH/SUD) treatment, and other medical and surgical treatment for decades, there is evidence that parity remains elusive. With numerous federal laws already in place, an effort to pass new legislation may not be the most fruitful endeavor. Indeed, new legislation may not even be the most effective option. Emerging research has suggested there is a correlation between negative attitudes and false beliefs regarding mental health and substance use disorder stigma and support for MH/SUD parity. Importantly, this data suggests that a fight against stigma may be a more useful path to achieving parity. The connection between support for parity policies and stigma presents an opportunity for advocates who are looking for new approaches to the ongoing problem of parity after decades of legislative efforts: advocates should consider supporting the adoption of anti-stigma work as an intervention in support of realizing MH/SUD parity.

Pandemic Response Through Whole Person Care: The Intersection of Physical and Mental Health and the Law

Jennifer Kinsley Smith, Esq., Elizabeth J. Lattner, MA, Allison Kreiner, MD, Edward Kilbane, MD, MA, Keyvan Ravakhah, MD, MBA 115

Formal arrangements between doctors and lawyers, termed, medical-legal partnerships (MLPs) have become increasingly common in the United States as a tool to address the social determinants of health affecting patients in local healthcare systems. These MLPs have enabled doctors and lawyers to partner in addressing health-harming social needs that have legal solutions. This article explores the relationships between MLPs, social determinants of health (SDOH), and the coronavirus pandemic through an in-depth reflection on the experiences of a Cleveland-based MLP. Through perspectives provided by medical and legal staff, this article highlights the successes and challenges of

implementing a pilot program aimed at addressing civil legal needs for patients in the associated hospital. Through that pilot program, MLP staff identified that almost all patients referred through the program were experiencing legal needs that were related to the coronavirus pandemic. This paper reflects upon the impact of social factors on mental and physical health and identifies where legal help can help address the social factors, improving overall health. Opportunities for improvement and replication are explored, leaving advocates with a roadmap to implement MLPs in their own communities.

Mind the App

Leah R. Fowler & Jessica L. Roberts 143

American mental health is at an all-time low, worsened by persistent stigma and systemic barriers to care. Smartphone applications for mental health (mental health apps) could offer an important alternative to traditional treatment. However, these technologies are not regulated consistently or uniformly, and the pandemic has resulted in the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) further relaxing certain regulatory standards, at least temporarily. This current and evolving patchwork system does very little to help potential users distinguish between high quality mental health apps and those that are effectively digital snake oil. This article seeks to address foreseeable misperceptions resulting from the current regulation of mental health apps—including the FDA’s pandemic guidance—and considers a voluntary labeling system that would better inform users of the risks and rewards of these technologies.