

Dear Congress men and women,

We are in the midst of a major health crisis in America. Imagine for a minute that you had a loved one come to you and told you that they had precancerous cells and this could someday turn into cancer. You would be worried and ready to seek treatment immediately. Now, imagine how you would feel if that same loved one told you that because the cells were precancerous and not cancer officially, the insurance company would not pay for their health care or any treatment for these precancerous lesions. This is exactly what is happening with individuals with mental health. Patients are being turned away because they are not actively suicidal or homicidal. Patients are reaching out for help when they are on the verge of crisis only to be told that their insurance isn't accepted here or that it won't cover their care unless they have an actual plan to kill themselves or others. If we wouldn't want the precancerous patient waiting until it was cancer, should we let our mental health patients wait until they are a danger to themselves or others? Mental health can result in death and suicidal rates are proving the significant of this. Something must be done. I have the pleasure of being a family practice provider in rural America. Every day I have patients of every walk of life come into the clinic but the majority of my day is spent trying to help and manage individuals with mental health concerns. Let me tell you what those in the health care field are dealing with. A middle school boy being bullied so bad that he has poor image of himself and cries nightly but yet his insurance won't pay for the counselor that is in the county so he has to take time out of his school day to go see a counselor 45 minutes away. A farmer who lost everything in the flood and is about to lose his home, feels nothing but hopelessness and despair and would be okay if he didn't wake up in the morning seeks help but a hospital refuses to admit him because he is not planning to harm himself. A mother who has lost herself while raising her family and has turned to anorexia for coping and now her body is starting to shut down but because she's not "severely ill or a danger" they will not pay for her treatment. A father to 3 works his whole life, breaks his leg and becomes addicted to opiates. This addiction leads to a life of substance use to get the next high but because he is an addict with a history of drug use, most insurances deny him because of "the liability." These are just a few examples of the issues that those with mental health face. All of these people need help but yet insurance refuses to help them and then you add to the fact that there are not enough mental health hospitals and institutions and these people are left to try to manage on their own. Suicide rates are so high and family health providers are inundated with large amounts of mental health patients because it is a 6-9 month wait to get into a psychiatrist. In every aspect, we are failing these individuals. When patients come and see a provider and are in such despair that it is felt they need inpatient treatment but then the insurance will not cover it, we are failing. We are failing. If you wouldn't want your loved one told to come back once the precancerous cells turned cancer, then don't allow this injustice to be done to those suffering from mental health diseases. I encourage you to really take the time to consider how to make improvements for the millions of Americans that are suffering daily.

Thank you for your time,

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