

News RELEASE

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APA Past President Tells HELP Committee Mental Health System ‘Mired in Crisis’

Arlington, VA – The American Psychiatric Association’s immediate past president, Paul S. Appelbaum, M.D., told the Senate’s Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Subcommittee on Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services that the nation’s “mental health system finds itself mired in crisis” and that a bold approach to fixing the long-neglected system is necessary. The committee hearing was held in response to a report released in July by President Bush’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, which also found fundamental problems with the mental health care system.

“After three decades of neglect and progressive defunding, the mental health system finds itself mired in crisis,” said Appelbaum, who also chairs the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. “If this were the situation only in Massachusetts, it would be a tragedy, but might not warrant the attention of this committee and all of Congress. But these scenarios are echoed in state after state.”

Appelbaum cited as evidence of the crisis “waiting lists of weeks to months in duration” for patients to receive treatment, as well as the reduction in size and the closure of hospital outpatient clinics. Inadequate private and public insurance coverage, he said, leaves many Americans without access to a continuum of health care services, including effective mental health care.

Of the President’s Commission on Mental Health report, Appelbaum said the recommendations were helpful and called for a fundamental transformation of the mental health system. As president of the APA, he appointed a task force to develop a vision of what a genuine mental health system should be.

Appelbaum provided to the committee copies of the APA report, *A Vision for the Mental Health System*, released in April, which resulted from the blue-ribbon task force he appointed. The report, which includes a set of 12 guiding principles, is a far-reaching blueprint for reforming and rebuilding the nation’s mental health system amidst the deepening funding crisis in state and local mental health services.

The APA report, *A Vision for the Mental Health System*, is online at:
http://www.psych.org/news_stand/visionreport040303.pdf.

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society, founded in 1844, whose more than 35,000 physician members specialize in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illnesses, including substance use disorders. For more information, visit the APA Web site at www.psych.org.

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