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NEWS RELEASE

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Psychiatric Services Highlights Patient Safety Through Expert Essays

Arlington, Va. –The December 2004 issue of *Psychiatric Services* features an occasional column entitled “Patient Safety Forum” in which experts address questions related to medical errors and other safety issues. The forum is edited by Benjamin Grasso, M.D., who is medical director of the Institute for Self-Directed Care in Portland, Maine.

This month’s column “Should Psychologists Have Prescribing Authority?” highlights five authors with contrasting opinions about prescribing rights among nonphysician mental health practitioners.

Presenting views on both sides of this timely issue are two psychologists – Deanna F. Yates, Ph.D., program director in psychopharmacology at Texas A&M University; and Jack G. Wiggins, Ph.D., of the Missouri Institute of Mental Health -- and three psychiatrists – Michelle Riba, M.D., M.S., president of the American Psychiatric Association (APA); James H. Scully Jr., M.D., medical director of the APA; and Jeremy A. Lazarus, M.D., chair of the APA Council on Advocacy and Public Policy and a private practitioner in Colorado.

Dr. Yates’ essay, “***Should Psychologists Have Prescribing Authority...A Psychologists Perspective,***” notes: “Psychologists are among the most highly trained doctoral-level providers of mental health services. In addition, psychologists who seek prescribing authority are required to receive a minimum of three years of medical training before they are allowed to prescribe.”

Dr. Wiggins’ “***Beyond Medication Errors***” points out: “Psychologists who will be prescribing in Louisiana, New Mexico and Guam are familiar with informed consent strategies and are trained to be alert for potential adverse drug events when prescribing. Doctors and patients working together through the informed consent model can reduce medication errors due to misunderstanding and thereby improve patient safety.”

Dr. Riba’s essay, entitled “***Evidence of the Dangers of Nonphysician Prescribing,***” notes: “...marriage counselors are not cardiologists simply because they know about matters of the heart; neither are psychologists psychiatrists by virtue of their knowledge of the brain and mental illnesses. Appropriate medical training is essential to safe prescribing.”

Dr. Scully’s essay, “***A Great Leap Backwards,***” says: “The proposals that psychologists prescribe medications and the laws passed in two states – New Mexico and Louisiana—represent a great leap backwards in providing healthcare to American citizens. Nearly 100 years ago, medical training in the United States was much like that proposed by some psychologists – apprenticeships lacked scientific rigor, there were economic conflicts among educators and certifying entities, and there was no assurance of patient safety.”

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Dr. Lazarus' "***Implications for Medication Errors and Patient Safety***" states: "These two states [New Mexico and Louisiana] will begin to serve as an uncontrolled experimental study on the practice of medicine by legislatures. Even as the educational requirements for medical students, psychiatric residents, and other physicians are becoming more stringent and uniform, the accountability of psychologists in these two states will be loosely controlled."

Psychiatric Services is published monthly by the APA for mental health professionals and others concerned with treatment and services for persons with mental illnesses and mental disabilities. In keeping with APA objectives to improve care and treatment, the journal promotes research and professional education in psychiatric and related fields, and advances the standards of all psychiatric services and facilities. For more information about these essays or the *Psychiatric Services* publication, please log onto <http://psychservices.psychiatryonline.org>.

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society, founded in 1844, whose close to 36,000 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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