

News RELEASE

American Psychiatric Association, 1000 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 1825, Arlington, VA 22209

For Information Contact:

Jason Young, 703-907-8582

jyoung@psych.org

Lydia Sermons-Ward, 703-907-8640

lsward@psych.org

For Immediate Release:

Tuesday, Oct. 5, 2004

Release No. 04-54

APA Says Proposed Medicare Drug Rules "Raise Major Concerns" Over Access

Arlington, Va. – The American Psychiatric Association (APA) submitted extensive written comments yesterday on proposed rules to implement Title I of the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003 (MMA). MMA will offer Medicare beneficiaries, for the first time, a prescription drug benefit, which will begin in 2006. The proposed rules, however, raise major concerns over whether beneficiaries will have access to all medically necessary pharmaceutical treatments.

In a 24-page letter to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), which issued the proposed rules, APA Medical Director James H. Scully Jr., M.D., Sc.D., urged CMS to adopt an alternative formulary for beneficiaries with mental illnesses – a formulary that is the least restrictive possible with respect to medications necessary to treat their conditions. He said the rules, as written, would result in a restrictive formulary, putting vulnerable patients at risk while increasing costs to Medicare because of increased emergency room visits and inpatient hospitalizations – costs that will top any savings from a restrictive formulary.

He also urged CMS to protect patients who are dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid. In 2006, those patients will be covered by the Medicare prescription drug benefit program – which, assuming a restrictive formulary, as exists in the proposed rules – would disrupt the continuity of their care. Currently, dual eligible beneficiaries are covered by Medicaid, and many are successfully being treated with a medication that may not be covered by the new benefit.

In addition, the APA said in its comments that the need for an alternative formulary is supported by the following facts:

- Medicare beneficiaries are a vulnerable population with unique medical needs, and are highly sensitive to and less tolerant of many medications;
- And, the medicines used in treating mental illnesses are "therapeutically non-interchangeable," rendering restrictions on access to the full range of needed medicines inappropriate.

To see the full text of the APA's comments, follow this link:

http://www.psych.org/advocacy_policy/reg_comments/cms-4086.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

###