



Health Care Committee

The RMC Health Care Committee has been active over the years focusing on health care issues such as, work force shortages, rural access to prescription medications, scope of practice regulations and the feasibility of developing a statewide telehealth consortium. Currently, the Committee has focused its attention on mental health and its access through the application of telemedicine, particularly, adolescent depression and mood disorders. In the course of these discussions, the Committee has reviewed data indicating that:

- According to a report published by Healthy People 2020, depression is the most common disorder identified in mental illness. It is the leading cause of disability in the work force, is responsible for more than 60% of all suicides each year and contributes to a shortened life span. Currently, suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death for adolescents in both the 10-14 and 15-19 age groups in this country.
- In 2013, the number of adolescents with a major depression episode (MDE) within the past 12 months was 2.6 million (10.7%) which included almost 360,000 who had a co-occurring substance abuse disorder. That number increased to 2.8 million due primarily to the increase in MDE incidents.
- Some studies cite the lack of evaluation for depression in office visits with the primary care physician. One such study stated that only 25% of the physicians surveyed included it despite the recognition by 75% of the respondents that it is a treatable condition.
- From a review of the Mental Health Workforce Availability Chart included in the 2015 MHA report, Maryland's ratio of population per mental health worker was ranked 21st (666:1) and was better than the national average (790:1) as well as its neighboring states excepting Delaware. On the other hand, there is increasing concern regarding the shortages of psychiatrists as services for mental health increase. A recent study initiated by the Mental Health Association of Maryland highlighted that finding. Among its results indicated that only 14% of the 1,154 psychiatrists identified under health reform were accepting new patients and available for appointments within 45 days.
- Nationally, the President Elect of the American Psychiatric Association estimated that the country will need another 30,000 child psychiatrists to augment the current 8,000 in practice to meet the mental health provisions included in the Affordable Care Act. However, the Kaiser Health News reported that lower pay, reimbursement difficulties and paperwork requirements are discouraging more medical students from considering this aspect of practice, which is one of the lower paying specialties in the medical profession.

Based on these findings, the Committee has accepted the following short-term goals in focusing on its future deliberations:

- Encourage all Primary physicians to include an evaluation for depression in their Private office visits
- Review and revise roles of School Nurse and Counselor to assist in detecting signs of depression for possible medical attention
- Develop certification programs in mental health to further enhance ADP's qualifications and offset the recognized physician shortage in addressing and treating or referring adolescents suffering from depression.

For more information, visit the RMC's website at: rural.maryland.gov
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Chaired by Tom McLoughlin, a former Hospital CEO, and RMC Executive Committee member, the Committee's membership consists of:

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Department of Health

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President and CEO, Atlantic
General Hospital

Ms. Roxanne Hale, MHA,
Director, Office of Primary Care
Access, Health Systems and
Infrastructure Administration
Maryland Department of Health
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Ms. Holly Ireland
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Ms. Teresa Zent, J.D.
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One of the Rural Maryland Council's major goals is to enhance rural policy development and coordination by regularly bringing stakeholders together to identify challenges common to rural areas and, by consensus, to develop, implement and monitor public and fiscal policy, programmatic or regulatory solutions. With a small staff, the RMC uses working committees to develop policy expertise across rural concerns and to engage already committed and knowledgeable rural advocates. Committees identify a specific challenge facing rural areas across the state or region, research the problem to get an overall understanding of it, and then, by consensus, develop proposed solutions. Solutions usually include developing or modifying state legislation, regulations, budget appropriations or programs. Committees bring recommendations to the full RMC Executive Board for approval and implementation. Committees also continue to monitor the results and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution, and to suggest changes over time, when necessary. Ultimately, the committees empower the RMC to speak on behalf of rural Marylanders with one voice on important issues.

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