



NARMH NOTES

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President's Message

by Rick Peterson

Indeed, I am honored to take office as President of the National Association for Rural Mental Health. My job has been made much easier because of the accomplishments of those who previously held this office. I hope my performance will be consistent with their efforts. I want to thank Mark Mitchell for serving as our president and for his leadership and service to the association. Mark's considerable experience, knowledge and skills will be not be lost, but will be put to good use in his new role as Past President. I would like to congratulate our newly elected Board officers:

President-Elect, Ann Schumacher, Kansas
Secretary, Linda Werlein, Texas
Treasurer, Paul Dupre, Vermont

I also want to extend a warm welcome to those elected to three-year terms on the NARMH Board of Directors:

Paul Mackie, Minnesota
Paul Dupre, Vermont
Helene Silverblatt, New Mexico
Nancy Speck, Texas

I am looking forward to working with the Board and our membership to further NARMH's mission of Linking Voices to Promote Rural Mental Health. Please take a few minutes to review our board's bios on the NARMH website at <http://www.narmh.org/about/board.html>. I would also like to recognize a long time Board member, Marcie Moran, South Dakota, who has completed her term

of service on the Board. Thanks Marcie for your tireless service to the Board of Directors and NARMH. Marcie will still remain active with NARMH as she will become an ex-officio member of the Board working on special projects.

In the News!

Health care reform and its impact on rural mental health. Much is to yet be decided with respect to health care reform. NARMH through its membership in the Mental Health Liaison Group continues to monitor the current versions of the bills. NARMH signed on along with other members of the Mental Health Liaison Group to endorse House version (HR 3200) which included several provisions to improve insurance coverage for people with mental illness. However, there are some provisions of the bill that need to be watched particularly with respect to the creation of a new health insurance exchange, or marketplace, where any individual or employer could buy coverage with at least minimum benefits. The measure requires that group insurers that offer insurance plans through the exchange abide by federal mental health parity requirements enacted in 2008. A concern is that the parity-law requirements would not apply to individual or small-group plans to offer minimum mental health converge.

This provision may have a negative impact on rural providers and our rural

populations as rural Americans already are dealing with disparities in health care not found in urban areas. Please educate yourself and your colleges as to the potential impact these various Bills have on mental health and substance abuse for our rural and frontier communities.

Potential Rural Friends Allies

The National Association for Rural Mental Health is pleased to express support for Dr. Regina Benjamin, President Obama's recent selection for the position of United States Surgeon General. Benjamin, a family doctor from the small town of Bayou La Batre, Alabama, is a nominee who brings a wealth of experience working in many facets of health care to this position. As founder, CEO and family physician at Bayou La Batre Rural Health Clinic, Benjamin knows the challenges rural health care providers face and has the skills to help overcome them.

In fact NARMH discovered Dr Benjamin long before President Obama did as she was a keynote speaker at NARMH's 2004 annual conference. Even then she was addressing issues of health disparities and lack of mental and substance abuse services for her patients in rural Alabama.

Mary Wakefield, Ph.D., R.N., was named administrator of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) by President Barack Obama on February 20, 2009. HRSA

is an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Dr. Wakefield joins HRSA from the University of North Dakota (UND), where she was associate dean for rural health at the School of Medicine and Health Sciences, a tenured professor, and director of the university's Center for Rural Health. She was director of the Rural Assistance Center, (<http://www.raconline.org/>) a HRSA-funded source of information on rural health and social services for researchers, policymakers, program managers, project officers and the general public.

In addition, the Center for Rural Health administered a \$1.6 million award from HRSA under the Critical Access Hospital Health Information Technology Implementation program. NARMH applauds the President's decision to nominate these two Friends of Rural.