AAMFT Continues Pressing Congress for Medicare MFT Coverage

Despite Medicare MFT coverage being dropped in the final moments from the Health Reform bill (as was Medicare LPC coverage), the AAMFT and our allies continue working together to determine why our provision was dropped from the final bill and collaborate and strategize for future advancement.

According to separate statements from Democratic Congressional staffers, this occurred due to “strong opposition” from President Obama’s health policy chief and Senate Majority Leader Reid’s (D-NV) staff. Staff of Obama and Reid were reportedly concerned about the viral Internet lie that Medicare MFT coverage “would put the government between you and your marriage.” So, they reportedly felt this provision could hurt the final Reform bill (which passed only narrowly), just as the “death panels” lie led to Medicare end-of-life counseling being dropped from the bill.

Majority Leader Reid’s staff denied these reports, stating that he supports Medicare MFT coverage. President Obama’s disability advisor, with whom staff of the AAMFT and our allies were able to meet in late July, was unaware of these reports but promised to review the situation. Neither Obama’s nor Reid’s staff cited any policy concerns about Medicare MFT coverage, so we hope that any political concerns will not recur now that the contentious Reform law has been enacted.

The AAMFT and our allies are planning for the possibility of including our issue during the likely “lame duck” Congressional session after the November 2\textsuperscript{nd} elections. Because most analysts think Democrats will definitely lose House and Senate seats (and possibly their majorities), a lame duck session would offer Democrats their best chance during the next two years to pass their remaining agenda. But a lame duck session would face both a large number of Democratic proposals and lack of cooperation from Congressional Republicans.

When the possible lame duck session starts to take shape, the AAMFT will ask members to quickly contact their Congresspersons to support Medicare MFT coverage.

AAMFT Receives $821,000 in Federal Funding for MFT Doctoral Fellowship Awards

The AAMFT has received our latest annual award—$821,000—for the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) administered through the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). This will support about 28 doctoral MFT students who have demonstrated interest in serving ethnic minority Americans through clinical or research careers.

While this is very good news, it is likely that fiscal 2011 funding of MFP and other federal programs for which MFT students are eligible will be no greater than in 2010. It also is likely that these funds for the fiscal year starting October 1 will be only for a partial year, so Congress will need to extend funding for the balance of the year during 2011.
Division Advocacy

**Illinois:** The Illinois division has succeeded in passing important legislation that will benefit the MFT profession. This legislation, Senate Bill 851, adds MFTs to the list of providers who can sign an emergency petition admitting individuals to a mental health facility. This legislation passed both the Senate and House without opposition. On July 28th, Governor Pat Quinn signed this legislation into law. Congratulations to the division on this important accomplishment.

**Louisiana:** The Louisiana division successfully advocated for legislation that will make some necessary improvements to the educational requirements for MFT licensure. Besides amending the educational requirements, this important legislation, House Bill 989, adds one additional MFT member to the licensure board and simplifies the requirements for out-of-state applicants to apply for MFT licensure. HB 989 passed the House and Senate, and the legislation was signed into law by Governor Bobby Jindal on June 25th. Congratulations to the division on the passage of this legislation.

**Missouri:** The Missouri division is celebrating the enactment of legislation that will benefit the profession. On July 7th, Governor Jay Nixon signed a bill, House Bill 2226, into law that will provide for licensure for MFT associates. This new law also prevents state and local government agencies from discriminating between persons licensed as MFTs when recommending services that MFTs can perform. Congratulations to the Missouri division on this accomplishment.

**New York:** The New York division was successful in advocating for legislation that fixed a significant problem in state law. Last year, due to a problem with state law, MFT associates and associates in other disciplines found out that the state licensing agency was not going to recognize hours of supervision that were accrued in most non-profit clinic settings. This decision impacted many MFT associates. Last June, legislation to correct this problem was filed. This legislation, Senate Bill 5921, which was supported by the division and other groups, allows those associates who accrued hours in good faith to have those hours count toward licensure. Earlier this year, SB 5921 passed the Senate and the House. On June 18th, Governor David Paterson signed this bill into law. The division played a leading role in advocating for this important legislation. Congratulations to the division on this accomplishment.

**Oklahoma:** The division was successful in advocating for a regulation that will provide Medicaid enrollees with access to MFTs and other providers who are in private practice. In March, the Oklahoma Health Care Authority Medical Advisory Committee voted to approve an initiative that the division and others have been working on for over two years. The new rule, which was approved by the Governor in May, will allow a person in crisis to be referred to a master’s level provider who can provide crisis intervention services. This new rule will allow individual MFTs in private practice to become Medicaid providers. Congratulations to the division on this important victory.

**Military MFT Collaborative**
The AAMFT has been working on efforts to increase both the number of MFTs who work as providers within the military, and to increase MFT access to mental health programs within the Department of Defense (DoD). Earlier this year, the DoD created a “Marriage and Family Counseling Collaborative.” The purpose of this Collaborative is to identify the utilization, capacity, training, and evidence-based guidelines for MFT support to meet the needs of members of the military, veterans, and their families. Among other things, this Collaborative will outline potential strategies for better utilization of providers, and develop standards related to MFT support. Several AAMFT members, along with individuals from the Department of Defense and other federal agencies, academic institutions, and other non-profit organizations, are participating in the MFCC.

AAMFT staff members are also participating in this Collaborative. In June, the AAMFT sent a survey to COAMFTE program directors in order to determine the types of military-related courses or internships that are offered. In order to learn more about the services that MFTs provide to military and veteran families, as well as to identify the barriers that exist for MFTs in treating members of the military, veterans, and their families, the AAMFT is planning on sending an online survey to Clinical Members later this year. A forum at the upcoming Annual Conference will discuss the MFT Collaborative in more detail. Anyone at the conference is welcome to attend this forum.