



Mental health care providers are available, but state laws make access difficult (Your view)

Letters from our readers By **Letters from our readers**

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As a mental health provider in Madison County, I'm writing in response to the recent articles presented on mental health and the lack of available treatment in our community. There are gaps in our health care system, but there are other factors that also contribute to this issue.

The Alabama law states that a person 14 years of age and older has to consent for treatment, meaning an adolescent has the right to refuse outpatient and/or inpatient care without the input of an adult. While this is a battle those of us in the mental health field fight on a daily basis, it is nothing in comparison to the parents who feel helpless when trying to get adequate mental health treatment for their children and realize the adolescent can go against them and refuse help. Many have argued there is no way an adolescent can understand what is best in regards to his/her treatment, especially when his/her judgment is skewed by thoughts of suicide, severe depression or even psychosis. However, until this law is changed, treatment providers must abide by the governing laws and allow the adolescents to make the decisions for their care.

We need to also consider the laws for involuntarily commitment for mental health in juveniles. It can be difficult to have a juvenile committed for inpatient psychiatric care due to high legal fees, and specific criteria must be met for a commitment to be valid. It is not enough for an adolescent to refuse medication and mental health treatment and meet criteria for involuntary commitment. The adolescent must commit some type of overt act for the legal system to consider a commitment.

Additionally, another problem in mental health treatment is the lack of insurance coverage. Many commercial insurances do not cover various types of mental health treatment, nor do they cover services for an extended period of time. Many insurances require strict criteria to be met in order for services such as inpatient psychiatric care to be covered.

There are numerous mental health providers in our community who are willing to work with those in need of care, but I do agree that access to these professionals does often come with wait times that can be detrimental to those in serious need. However, we need to address ways to overcome the issues listed above in order to help our society achieve better results in mental health care.

To all of those who are concerned about improving our mental health care in our state and insuring that our children and adolescents receive the best care possible, please contact your legislators and plead with them to change these laws in our mental health system to provide for adequate care in our communities.

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