

Vermont Association for Mental Health

P.O. Box 165, Montpelier, VT 05601

March 27, 2007

Joshua Slen
Director
Office of Vermont Health Access
312 Hurricane Lane
Suite 201
Williston, VT 05495

Dear Josh,

As a coalition of parents, providers, and child mental health advocates, we've grown increasingly concerned about the phenomenon of polypharmacy in young children. Our concerns were further heightened by the recent tragedy in Massachusetts where a 4 year old girl overdosed and died on medications prescribed since age 2 for the treatment of bipolar disorder. We would like to ensure that we are doing everything possible to guard against such tragedies in Vermont.

Medication can play an important role in the treatment of children and adolescents with psychiatric disorders. However, medication alone is never an adequate or appropriate intervention. It should only be used as a component of a comprehensive treatment plan, closely monitored and individualized to the needs of the child and family. Parents should also not feel pressured into starting children on medication out of a sense of desperation or because of a lack access to other effective and appropriate treatment services.

There are particular concerns when medications are used in the treatment of preschool children with behavioral or emotional signs and symptoms. Accurate diagnosis is challenging, and long-term research on the safety and efficacy of many of the medications is limited in this age group. Accordingly, we feel it's important and appropriate to exercise extra caution when using multiple psychiatric medications in treating young children.

Based on the above concerns, we would request your assistance in developing a process to monitor this issue on a statewide basis. Specifically, we would ask you to initiate a review of the existing Medicaid database to determine how many Vermont Medicaid recipients age 6 and under are currently receiving treatment with one or more medications which are used in the treatment of psychiatric disorders. In particular, we would like to know the age at which such treatment began and the specialty of the physician or other health care professional who is prescribing the medications. We would also appreciate your thoughts and suggestions regarding an appropriate forum or

procedure to facilitate ongoing monitoring and attention to this issue, in a manner which incorporates and includes appropriate input and involvement of consumers, family members, and health care professionals.

Thank you for considering the above request. We look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

Ken Liberto
Executive Director
Vermont Association for Mental Health

On behalf of:

Vermont Council of Developmental
& Mental Health Services
Vermont Association of Child
and Adolescent Psychiatry
Vermont Association for Mental
Health
Vermont Psychological Association
The Vermont Federation of Families
for Children's Mental Health
Vermont Psychiatric Survivors
Vermont Protection & Advocacy, Inc.
Vermont Center for Independent
Living

cc: John Pandjani
Michael Hartman, Deputy Commissioner for Mental Health
Governor Jim Douglas
Sharon Moffat, Acting Commissioner of Health
Charlie Biss
Bill McMains, M.D.

KL/ac