



FEDERATION OF TEXAS PSYCHIATRY *A United Voice for Texas Psychiatry*

Psychologists Prescribing: Online Crash Course Programs

Clinical psychologists are behavioral professionals with competencies in psychological assessment and psychotherapy (i.e., talk therapy) treatment. Psychologists and psychiatrists work together every day, and it is clear that psychologists have an important collaborative role in the mental health delivery system.

However, psychologists have no required basic medical education or training at any level of their undergraduate or doctoral study. Simply put, clinical psychologists are not medical practitioners. They are not trained to assess the entire person and to understand the effects of pharmaceutical and other medical treatments on diseases and conditions that afflict the systems of the body.

State lawmakers across the country are approached every day to consider legislation that would permit clinical psychologists to prescribe powerful psychotropic medications with potentially disabling side effects after a haphazard online training program of as little as 400 total hours. If you are a licensed psychologist, all that is required for admission is an updated curriculum vitae, an internet connection and approximately \$15,000. No further testing or requirements are necessary for admission to Masters of Science in Clinical Psychopharmacology (MSCP) programs.

In contrast, rigorous admission standards, 2,700 hours of medical school classroom education and three years of residency training are required of psychiatrists and other physicians to ensure safe and effective medical practice.

We urge policymakers to review the curricula, faculty and requirements of the few online crash course prescribing programs that exist today. Curricula that are not rigorous, conducted online and are too brief to cover the required subjects are commonplace.

For example, one online MSCP program claims to teach all of the basic biological foundations for treating brain disorders with powerful medication in as little as 90 total hours. This program's Frequently Asked Questions page states "it's up to you to decide what you need to meet the requirements of the program" under the headline "How many hours a week is involved?"¹.

You will also find that many teachers at these institutions are graduates of these very programs, and they possess little essential qualification for didactic training in the practice of medicine. It is not surprising that a recent resource manual from this online program with tips for graduates seeking to gain prescribing authority in the U.S. Armed Forces cite a history of concerned military medical officials that "refuse to support applications [from psychologists] for a Drug Enforcement Agency number."²

Recommendation -

Medical treatment of psychiatric disorders cannot be taught in a silo under poorly regulated educational programs with insufficient standards. We ask you to reject these proposals in favor of real reforms that improve access to safe, effective and integrated treatment of individuals that suffer from mental illness and other co-occurring conditions.

See these standards in action for yourself. The following appears within the Frequently Asked Questions of an online psychologists prescribing Masters' degree program. This program is the largest among a small handful of these poorly regulated graduate programs that seek to give a prescribing pad to individuals with no required biomedical background:

"Q: Will I have to take exams? A: Exams are typically given for each weekend. Most exams are multiple choice format. Review materials and/or cases are frequently provided to help students prepare for the exams.

Q: What if I don't pass an exam? A: Passing a course is based on an average of all exams in the course, so one low exam score can be made up on other exams. If you do not pass a class, we will develop a plan for you to do remedial work and retake an exam."

¹ <http://view2.fdu.edu/academics/university-college/school-of-psychology/masters-level-programs/ms-in-clinical-psychopharmacology/frequently-asked-questions/>

² http://rxpsychology.fdu.edu/Resources/Military_Support_Manual.pdf