

## IN THIS ISSUE

- 4 Much of What I Taught Was Wrong
- 6 Continuing Competence
- 7 PPA Experiments With Flipped Classroom
- 8 I Got Schooled
- 9 PA Graduate Students Win APA/APAGS Awards
- 9 Governor Signs Immunity for Reporters of Drug Overdoses Bill
- 10 Payment Limits for Copying Records

# The Pennsylvania Psychologist

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## Introduction to Articles on Education and Psychology

Samuel Knapp, EdD, ABPP



Dr. Samuel Knapp

Education is very important in contemporary society. Length of education is highly correlated with many quality-of-life variables including self-reported happiness, marital success, life expectancy, and income. It is not surprising that issues surrounding education are discussed so widely and debated so hotly.

Contemporary discussions about education have been dominated by debates over Common Core, teacher accountability, and innovations in technology. However, from the long-term perspective, the real issues in education are availability and quality. Availability means universal access to reasonably appropriate education. Quality refers to the efficiency and effectiveness of preparing students for success in life.

Universal education has come to pass slowly. Despite the interest of the Puritans in promoting education, public support of education was limited (or non-existent) in many states. Gradually states began to support public education, then require it, then eliminate legalized segregation in public education, then ensure women had equal access to higher education, and finally to ensure that children with disabilities could receive an education. However, a lingering question is whether the formality of schooling equals a meaningful educational experience.

The quality of education is measured by the efficiency and effectiveness with which students reach their goals. Americans have long experimented with new methods to improve the quality of teaching. For example, the blackboard was first used in the United States by a mathematics instructor in 1801; Bronson Alcott (the father of the author Louisa May Alcott) refused to use corporal punishment in his Temple School founded in 1834; and Americans adopted the German concept of a “children’s garden” (kindergarten; the first American one opened in Wisconsin in 1856).

However, the largest advancement in educational quality has been the explicit endorsement of evidence-based teaching. Progress has been made despite the methodological issues in studying teacher effectiveness which make psychotherapy outcome studies look like experiments in a physics laboratory. Educational researchers need to consider the composition of the class, class size, ages of the children, teacher characteristics, parental and family factors, school environment, and how

*Continued on page 3*

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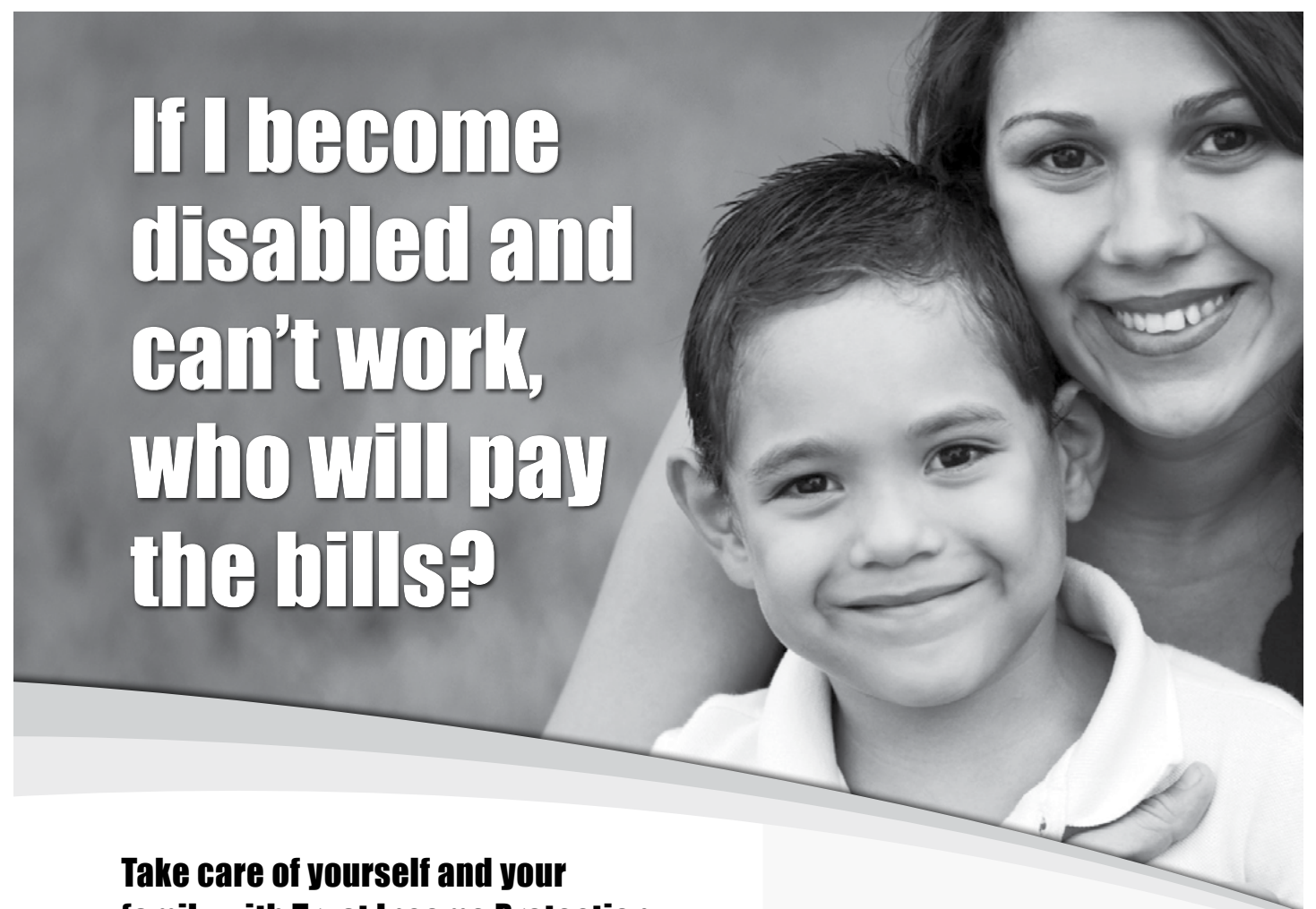


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## ARTICLES ON EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY

*Continued from page 1*

they interact with the content matter and educational goals. One of the most significant, but lesser known, provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act was the creation of the Institute for Educational Sciences and its What Works Clearinghouse, a data base for evidence-based educational strategies (Kantrowitz, 2014).

### Advances in Access and Quality

All of the discussions on education, including discussions of technological innovations should focus on the possibility that the changes will make education more available or improve its quality. There is a tendency to be awed by technological innovations without asking whether it succeeds in achieving its goals. We should neither reject nor embrace technological changes in education a priori. Instead, we need to ask what technology works best for what students, delivered by which educator, for which subject, with what goals, and in what context. Fortunately, some evidence suggest that some technological advances can further the goal of making educational opportunities more widely available to the public. For example, massive on-line open courses (MOOCs; Schroeder, 2014) can democratize education, and companies such as Coursera or the Kahn Academy use technology to further those goals.

Another example of positive technological advances comes from the efforts

of the distinguished social psychologist Edward Diener and his wife Carol who intend to make high-quality psychology textbooks free online; thus making quality resources more affordable for students. Students could save money by avoiding the need to purchase a new textbook for every class and the web material could have access to video clips, exercises, and other learning aids. Furthermore, individual chapters could be updated without having to reissue the entire book (Roediger, 2014).

### Articles Related to Innovations in Education

The articles in this series deal with different aspects of the education revolution.

The article "I Got Schooled" by M. Night Shyamalan (2013) offers evidence-based recommendations on what works to bridge that large education gap. The issues raised by Mr. Shyamalan illustrate how the concepts of educational access and quality are so closely linked. We need to ask whether education that is conducted so poorly that its graduates lack basic literacy skills is truly universal education.

The other articles deal directly with the education of psychologists. In "Much of What I Taught Was Wrong" I (Samuel Knapp) reflect on the half-life of psychology as evidenced by the change in the knowledge base since I taught introduction to psychology 20 years ago.

*There is a tendency to be awed by technological innovations without asking whether it succeeds in achieving its goals.*

The article "Continuing Competence: How Well Does Mandated Continuing Education Work?" asks whether mandatory continuing professional education for psychologists actually improves the skills sets of psychologists (the answer is that it does). "PPA Experiments With Flipped Classroom" describes some recent innovations by PPA to improve the quality of education for psychologists.

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# Much of What I Taught Was Wrong

Samuel Knapp, EdD, ABPP

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, I taught several classes in introductory psychology where I followed the content of the standard textbooks closely. Looking back, I now realize that much of what I taught was irrelevant, misleading, incomplete, or just plain wrong.

**Irrelevant:** Among many other things, I taught students about the schools of psychology such as functionalism and structuralism. They learned the Cannon-Bard theory of emotion, and the different learning theories of Tolman, Guthrie, and others. I do not mean to be disrespectful of these psychologists who conscientiously advanced the knowledge base for psychology. However, in hindsight, their contributions do not merit being mentioned given the limited space in an introductory course.

**Misleading:** I especially enjoyed teaching social psychology. But now I realize that much of what I (we) taught was based on studies with WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich,

and democratic) participants (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) and might not necessarily generalize to non-Western cultures. It was, in part, an artifact of the demographics of the field dominated by white, English-speaking males. Now, we know that culture, age, gender, race, and other factors can greatly influence the outcome of these experiments and we do not generalize the results without evidence to do so; or at least expound the theories with appropriate caveats. For example, Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance and Holland's theory of career choice may have limited applicability to persons from non-Western backgrounds (Hardin et al., 2014). Cheng et al. (2011) argue against a wholesale jettison of the knowledge base of Western psychology. Instead, they urge psychologists across cultures to collaborate to search for a psychology that better distinguishes between universal and culturally specific concepts.

**Wrong:** I taught my students that adults did not grow any new brain cells. I was wrong (Shors, 2014). I referenced

*Science is not so much a collection of facts, but a method that facilitates a continual search for better explanations.*

bystander apathy by discussing the murder of Kitty Genovese (subsequent research shows that the basic facts of the case were misunderstood by early researchers in this field). I have long since discarded my lecture notes, but I fear that if I did travel back in time to review them I would find even more information that was of marginal value, misleading, or just plain wrong.

Of course the fact that much of what I taught is now outdated is a good thing because it means that psychology

*Continued on page 5*

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## MUCH OF WHAT I TAUGHT WAS WRONG

*Continued from page 4*

is advancing as a field. The amount of knowledge within the field of psychology is exploding and the half-life of psychology (the amount of time it takes for half of the knowledge base to become obsolete) is expected to decline from 9 to 7 years in the near future (Neimeyer, Taylor, & Rozensky, 2012). Some fear that psychology is breaking down into subspecialties to the point that it cannot survive as a unified discipline. At the same time psychology is integrating and acknowledging overlap with other disciplines. My own area of interest—moral development—has been greatly enriched by contributions from behavioral economics, anthropology, primatology, neuroscience, philosophy, and other fields.

What did I teach that was enduring? I do not know what, if anything,

students remembered from one course given 25 years ago.<sup>1</sup> But I wanted them to retain a combination of curiosity and humility. Psychology is interesting because it addresses fundamental human questions dealing with how we learn, how we can enhance our relationships, how we can improve the well-being of our communities, and other issues. But the quest for knowledge should keep us humble.

Science is not so much a collection of facts, but a method that facilitates a continual search for better explanations. We fight our tendency toward confirmatory bias by seeking ways to disprove what we believe. But if I were to ever teach introductory psychology again, I would emphasize the

<sup>1</sup>Recently I ran into a former student who told me that she always remembered the lesson that I emphasized which is that we should learn to love ourselves. It is very possible that I made such a comment off handedly, but I have no recollection of ever saying that and it sounds unlike something that I would emphasize.

methodology and thinking processes even more, knowing full well that many of the facts that I teach today will be irrelevant, misleading, or just plain wrong in the next 25 years.

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# Continuing Competence

## How Well Does Mandated Continuing Education Work?

Samuel Knapp, EdD, ABPP, Director of Professional Affairs

**T**he APA Ethics Code requires that psychologists maintain their level of competence throughout their careers. Because of the rapid increase in knowledge in the field of psychology, psychologists need to work hard to maintain their competence. The length of the half-life for psychology is becoming shorter and shorter (the half-life of a profession refers to the amount of time it takes in order for half of the knowledge base to become outdated or inadequate). In one study participants estimated that the half-life for psychology was currently 9 years, but in the future it would be even shorter (to 7 years; Neimeyer, Taylor, & Rozensky, 2012).

Most psychologists engage in continual professional development to ensure their competence. Neimeyer, Taylor, & Wear (2011) found that psychologists spent a mean of 85 hours a year on continuing professional education, including independent professional reading and other activities, as well as attending continuing education (CE) programs. However, psychologists varied considerably in the amount of time that they spent on professional development. Before states began to mandate continuing education, a significant minority of psychologists engaged in almost no professional development activities.

Currently, most states mandate continuing education for psychologists. In many ways the current system of mandating continuing education has been

*The question remains as to whether CE actually improves the quality of services of psychologists.*

a success. CE mandates increase the amount of continuing education that psychologists receive (Neimeyer, Taylor, Zemanski, & Rothke, 2013). Also, psychologists who live in states that have mandated CE tend to get more continuing education than psychologists who live in states that do not mandate CE (Neimeyer, Taylor, & Orwig, 2013). Finally, psychologists who live in states that mandated ethics CE tend to get more continuing education in ethics than psychologists who live in states that do not mandate ethics CE.

Nonetheless the question remains as to whether CE actually improves the quality of services of psychologists. Although, I could find no study that proves that continuing education improves the quality of services provided by psychologists, three sources of information suggest that it does. First the minority of psychologists who used to engage in almost no continuing professional development now must have at least some.

Second, most psychologists believe that continuing education helps them maintain their clinical competence.

Most psychologists agreed (or strongly agreed) that ethics CE increased their level of knowledge (73%), translated into practice (66%), and reduced their professional liability (60%); Neimeyer, Taylor, & Wear, 2011). In Pennsylvania, 75% of psychologists agreed that CE should be mandatory for relicensure and only 10% disagreed (Sharkin & Plageman, 2003).

Finally, studies involving physicians have found a direct link between intensive and interactive continuing education programs and actual patient care. A review of continuing education meetings for physicians concluded that

Educational meetings alone or combined with other interventions can improve professional practice and the achievement of treatment goals by patients. The effect on professional practice tended to be small but varied between studies . . . mixed interactive and didactic education was more effective than either alone (Forsetlund, et al., 2012).

The most effective programs tended to be longer, involved multiple interventions over time, and involved a smaller number of participants (Mansouri & Lockyer, 2007). The extent to which these findings could generalize to psychology is unclear. Nonetheless, it is consistent with the subjective impressions of psychologists on the value of continuing education.

*Continued on page 7*



## CONTINUING COMPETENCE

*Continued from page 6*

Despite the apparent success of some forms of continuing education, some scholars have advocated for exploring alternative ways of ensuring continuing competence. These could include written or oral examinations as a condition of licensure renewal, peer review of work, consumer satisfaction surveys, records reviews, on-site practice reviews, evaluation of “standardized patients,” performance evaluations, or learning portfolios (Swankin, LeBuhn, & Morrison, 2006). Or, “points” may be granted for those who perform pre-workshop chart audits, post-lecture reading assignments and reflection exercises, or personal learning projects before or after the formal program (Davis et al., 2013). Some medical specialty boards are requiring special maintenance of certification (MOC) requirements, including re-examinations, in order for physicians to retain their board certification (American Board of Medical Specialties, 2014).

Two jurisdictions have experimented with such broader interpretations of

continuing professional development. Ontario has a practice review and New Hampshire requires a certain number of hours in consultation as conditions for licensure renewal. In addition, the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP; n.d.) plans to introduce a maintenance of competence program which will be mandatory for those who received their diplomates after January 10, 2015. The accompanying article (PPA Experiments With Flipped Classroom) describes how PPA is presenting a variation on traditional continuing education programs.

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## PPA Experiments With Flipped Classroom

Hybrid or flipped learning programs are becoming more common in the curriculum of scientific programs. The concept of hybrid learning is well established in literature or the humanities where, for example, students were expected to read a short story or novel before class, and then be prepared to discuss it during the class. However, such processes were less common in the teaching of STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) disciplines until very recently. Previously, it was common for the science or math teacher to introduce the concepts for the first time during a lecture and then give students homework designed for them to apply these concepts.

However, many science instructors are adopting the hybrid or flipped models that are common in literature courses. That is, students are expected to read

materials ahead of time and then spend the class time discussing the concepts, applying them, and getting direct and immediate feedback on their performance.

At the spring CE program in Pittsburgh, PPA will be experimenting with a flipped classroom in two of its continuing education programs: The Hidden Ethics Code (with Samuel Knapp and Jeffrey Sternlieb) and Unlearning Ethics (with Samuel Knapp and John Gavazzi). Participants in each of these CE programs will have the opportunity to take a one-hour CE home study course with readings directly related to the content of the live-CE programs. The goal is to provide a background that will enhance the content and experience of the live program. Of course, no participant has to take the home study CE program ahead of time and no one will be denied admission because they failed to complete it.

## BOOK REVIEW

# I Got Schooled

*The Unlikely Story of How a Moonlighting Movie Maker Learned the Five Keys to Closing America's Education Gap*

M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN

Reviewed by Samuel Knapp, EdD, ABPP

M. Night Shyamalan is best known for his highly successful films, including *The Sixth Sense*. However, he also endows a non-profit foundation which sponsored a review of how to close the achievement gap between top performing and poorly performing schools.

Good schools are important for individuals and important for the nation as a whole. Students with more education are more likely to earn more money in their lifetime, have better health, live longer, report that they are happy, and have stable marriages. For the nation as a whole, our ability to compete internationally depends to a large extent on the technical expertise of our citizens. Unfortunately, the United States ranks relatively low among industrialized countries in the performance of its students. However, the problems with the schools are not distributed equally throughout the country. The top performing schools in the United States compare favorably with the top performing schools anywhere else. But the United States has a large number of schools where the students perform very poorly.

This book is not about teaching techniques nor is it about good education in general. It focuses instead on the specific question of how to narrow the enormous gap between schools where students do well and schools where students do poorly. Despite the narrowed focus, Shyamalan has taken on a formidable task.

Education reform (and education in general) tends to generate a lot of emotion. When Shyamalan began his research into making schools perform better, he encountered many

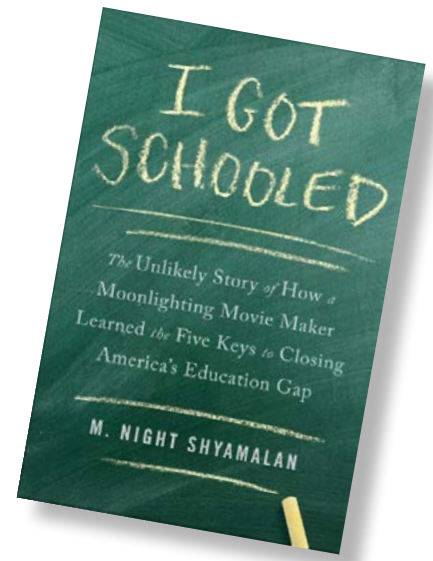
professionals and parents who held strong opinions concerning school reform. Although he listened carefully to them, like a good social scientist, he followed the data.

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*Shyamalan identifies five factors that are needed to close the education gap.*

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Increasing teacher salaries, improving facilities, increasing per pupil expenditures, reducing class size, having teachers achieve master's degrees, or expanding charter schools have all been promoted as solutions to underperforming schools. However, when the data was reviewed, none of these reforms consistently predicted improvements in school performance. This is not to say that class size is completely unrelated to educational performance. Most studies do not address a floor effect. That is, the studies did not look at extreme cases. For example, a study may look at the impact of decreasing class size from an average of 25 to 18 students per classroom and find no significant improvement in student performance. However, the results need to be interpreted in light of the usual parameters of class size found in most schools. It does not mean that there is a license to increase class size to high levels, such as increasing class size from an average of 25 students per classroom to 50 students per classroom.



Some proponents of educational change strongly endorsed charter schools. But the data on charter schools is mixed. It is true that charter schools are some of the best performing schools; but they are also some of the worst performing schools.

Shyamalan identifies five factors that are needed to close the education gap: getting rid of poor teachers, educational leadership, using systematic feedback, small schools (not smaller classrooms), and more actual time in class. However, these factors are effective when used in combination with each other. Shyamalan began to understand the interaction of these variables while listening to a colleague who described how he taught his medical residents about the impact of healthy lifestyle habits on the health and longevity of their patients. Several habits, such as getting enough sleep, exercising, eating a balanced diet, or managing stress add substantially to the life span of each individual. However, these factors act better in concert with each other and the failure to follow one of these steps, such as the failure to refrain from smoking, can offset the benefits of following the other lifestyle habits. Similarly, researchers have been able to identify several factors related to good school performance.

*Continued on page 9*



## I GOT SCHOOLED

*Continued from page 8*

Furthermore, Shyamalan warns against misinterpreting the data. For example, the issue of removing bad teachers is highly controversial, especially given the complexity of evaluating what makes a teacher good. But Shyamalan is clear that removing poor teachers should be done rarely and only after a good faith effort has been made to help the teachers improve their performance, including the administrative support, useful feedback, and instructional resources that they need to succeed. The tenure system is misguided to the extent that teachers can receive permanent certification after three years of teaching, even though it typically takes several more years for beginning teachers to become proficient. Even so, removing poor teachers will have a negligible impact on closing the education gap unless it is done in concert with the other educational changes.

This interesting book includes numerous examples of direct visits to schools, and interviews with teachers, students, and educational leaders, such as Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), Teach for America, and Uncommon Schools. I also found it helpful to listen to the interviews with M. Night Shyamalan that can be found on YouTube.

### Reference

Shyamalan, M. N. (2013). *I Got Schooled: The Unlikely Story of How a Moonlighting Movie Maker Learned the Five Keys to Closing America's Education Gap*. NY: Simon & Schuster.

## Pennsylvania Graduate Students Win Prestigious APA/APAGS Awards

Allie Abrahamson and Rebecca A. Bernard, doctoral students in psychology at Chestnut Hill College, were joint recipients of the prestigious 2014 APA/APAGS Award for Distinguished Graduate Student in Professional Psychology. The citation notes "their creativity, courage, and dedication [which] led them to create the Human Rights Forum at Chestnut Hill College to promote human rights education, awareness, and community services opportunities for doctoral students" (Citation, 2014, p. 829, 831). Among other activities, their work with the Human Rights Forum led to the development of the Merging Cultures Program which allowed doctoral students to become involved with newly immigrated and refugee families in Philadelphia.

### Reference

Citation. (2014). *American Psychologist*, 69, 829, 831.

## Governor Signs PPA-Backed Bill Providing Immunity for Reporters of Drug Overdoses

Governor Corbett has signed Act 139 of 2014 which provides immunity from prosecution for persons who seek medical assistance on behalf of another individual who is experiencing a drug overdose, as well as for the actual person experiencing the drug overdose. This law provides immunity for crimes dealing primarily with the possession of the drugs, being under the influence of the drugs, or for relevant parole or probation violations.

Drug overdoses are the leading cause of accidental death in the United States (slightly more than motor vehicle accidents) for Americans aged 25 to 64. In 2010, 1,653 Pennsylvanians died from drug overdoses. The number of drug related overdoses among young adults (18–25) has increased 250% since 1999. Drug overdoses from prescription drugs (especially opiates such as Oxycontin and Vicodin) are more common than overdoses caused by illegal drugs.

Most of the victims die one to three hours after ingesting the drug. However, the fear of arrest and prosecution prevent many from calling 911 to summon emergency medical assistance. Whereas a witness to a heart attack would seldom think twice about calling for emergency services, witnesses to overdoses from drugs are often reluctant to call. The law also allows emergency medical service technicians to administer naloxone, a drug which has been found effective in preventing deaths from overdoses.

PPA was one of the early supporters of this bill.

## Erratum

In the article in the December *Pennsylvania Psychologist*, "Reflections" by Dr. Samuel Knapp, it was written that the late Dr. Irwin Hyman was once a neighbor of State Senator James Rhoades. That is incorrect. A student of Dr. Hyman's was once a neighbor of Senator Rhoades.

## Act 26 Sets Payment Limits for Copying Records

Under 42 Pa.C.S. §6152 and 6155 (relating to subpoena of records and rights of patients), the Secretary of Health is directed to adjust annually the amounts which may be charged by a health care facility or health care provider upon receipt of a request or subpoena for production of medical charges or records. Because the law specifically references “health care providers,” as opposed to just physicians, PPA believes that the law applies to psychologists.

Effective January 1, 2015, the following payments may be charged by a health care facility or health care provider for production of records in response to a subpoena:

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In addition to the amounts listed, charges may also be assessed for the actual cost of postage, shipping and delivery of the requested records.

In addition, the secretary sets a flat fee for the purpose of supporting a claim or appeal under the Social Security Act or any federal or state financial needs-based benefit program or a request made by a district attorney. The flat fee that can be charged by a psychologist for a claim or appeal under the Social Security Act or any federal or state financial needs-based benefit program is \$27.48 plus charges for the actual cost of postage, shipping, and delivery of the requested records. The flat fee that can be charged by a psychologist for a request made by a district attorney is \$21.69 plus charges for the actual cost of postage, shipping, and delivery of the requested records. Requests from independent or executive branch agencies of the government are exempt from the record copying fee requirements. This law does not apply to copying required by insurance companies to monitor services under an insurance contract. The rate is increased annually according to the Consumer Price Index.

The law does not alter the requirement that psychologists must have a signed release from the patient before releasing the information to a third party.

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## 2015 CE Calendar

The following programs are being offered either through co-sponsorship or solely by PPA.

### March 19-20

*Spring Continuing Education and Ethics Conference*  
DoubleTree Hotel Monroeville  
Monroeville, PA

### June 17-20

*PPA Annual Convention*  
Hilton Harrisburg  
Harrisburg, PA

### October 29-30

*Fall Continuing Education and Ethics Conference*  
Sheraton Great Valley  
Frazer, PA

Contact: [judy@papsy.org](mailto:judy@papsy.org)

### Podcasts

New podcasts for CE credit by Dr. John Gavazzi are now available on [www.papsy.org](http://www.papsy.org).

For CE programs sponsored by one of the Regional Psychological Associations in Pennsylvania, visit [www.papsy.org](http://www.papsy.org).

Registration materials and further conference information are available at [www.papsy.org](http://www.papsy.org).

If you have additional questions, please contact [ppa@papsy.org](mailto:ppa@papsy.org).



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