

ATTACHMENT

For Item

27

TUESDAY
April 30, 2024

PUBLIC COMMUNICATION RECEIVED BY THE
CLERK OF THE BOARD

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April 29, 2024

County of San Diego Board of Supervisors
1600 Pacific Highway
San Diego, California 92101

Re: Opposition Item #27 Resolution on Mental Health Therapists' Patient Management Time

Dear County of San Diego Board of Supervisors,

We appreciate your deep commitment to ensuring San Diego County employees and residents receive the most effective and appropriate quality mental health services. Kaiser Permanente strives to meet the needs of our members, your constituents, and workforce by ensuring high quality behavioral health therapy services are as accessible and productive as possible. We are concerned that the language in this motion is not accurate and is counter to your efforts in support of appropriate quality mental health services. We would like to help explain why and share the details related to Patient Management Time (PMT) and how it works at Kaiser Permanente.

PMT is non-direct patient care time for administrative functions. For example, this may include social worker coordination, medical record documentation, scheduling, consultation with colleagues, and responding to in-basket messages from patients, parents, teachers, and others.

In 2023, to ensure fairness and equity for the therapists across all Southern California, we moved to a standard amount of time for PMT across Southern California. Therapists have voiced their desires over many years for equal caseloads and this standardization effort helps avoid inequities between medical centers. Last year, we moved to this new PMT formula, and it is now effectively in place throughout all Southern California. In fact, the change resulted in many more therapists receiving increased PMT as compared to before. It is fair, equitable, and we believe it is the right amount of time for a therapist to complete PMT duties. **The move to a standard amount of time did not result in a change of PMT time in San Diego, as 4 hours has been the practice in San Diego.**

Kaiser Permanente behavioral therapists throughout Southern California who practice individual therapy full time are allotted four hours per week of scheduled PMT, in addition to time for department meetings. It is very common for a patient to cancel their appointments at the last minute or not show up for appointments, which results in additional PMT time, commonly referred to as "Net Loss." On a consistent basis, more than 10% of a behavioral therapist's appointments result in Net Loss (10% is equivalent to at least 3.5 hours per week for a full-time therapist). So, typical PMT time includes the four hours plus an average of 3.5 hours of Net Loss time, for a total of 7.5 hours PMT time per week.

If Net Loss exceeds 10%, Kaiser Permanente reasonably expects that some of this extra time is used for PMT and some scheduled PMT hours are then made available to book clinical

appointments for patients. This flexibility enables Kaiser Permanente and its behavioral health therapists to better serve our patients. We have struck a responsible balance between direct patient care time and PMT that supports our therapists and advances our shared goal of providing high quality, accessible services to our diverse membership.

If a particular behavioral therapist's patient load and circumstances present challenges, the therapists are encouraged on a weekly basis to talk to their manager for problem solving and additional assistance. Therapists are encouraged to confer with their managers if workload adjustments are needed.

Efficiently managing PMT time is crucial to meeting the growing demand of mental health therapy. As a result of the de-stigmatization of mental health and increased demand in the wake of the COVID pandemic, we have seen unprecedented need for psychotherapy services across the country. Kaiser Permanente is committed to meeting this challenge. We have hired over 250 additional internal Kaiser Permanente therapists across Southern California and have contracted with several hundred outside therapists so that our therapists have reduced caseloads and can provide their patients with timely access and more focused care management.

Kaiser Permanente members in San Diego County expect timely access to high quality care. That is exactly what Kaiser Permanente is trying to do with efficient use of direct patient care appointments and PMT. Our priority is to ensure that patient-centered mental health services are accessible to our members in a timely manner in accord with California law and good patient care. Therefore, we respectfully oppose the proposed resolution as it is counter to our obligation to your constituents and employees in need of mental health care.

We will continue to work collaboratively with our behavioral health therapist colleagues to ensure that our patients are well-served and our therapists are well-supported.

Thank you for your consideration.



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