sent by Rich Winkel (activ-l) - Oct 13, 2004

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The Influence of TMAP: Mandatory Mental Health Evaluations

by Stefan P. Kruszewski, M.D.
Independent Media TV

Several individuals sent me a copy of Melissa Carr's article, "Just Say No to Bush's Drugs," shortly after it appeared on the Independent Media TV Section, Under Reported. I want to respond to her journalistic courage.

Specifically, I want to recognize her accurate and compelling comments on a critically under-reported situation.

The corporate purchase of influence by pharmaceutical companies, either through Texas Medication Algorithm Project (TMAP) or the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, has currently created a significant embarrassment for Pennsylvania government and an annoyance for several other state governments, including Texas, Florida and Illinois. Briefly, I'll highlight a few relevant developments and findings.

Pennsylvania's Department of Public Welfare was influenced to adopt TMAP (In Pennsylvania, TMAP is called PennMAPS) in late 2001 by a relatively small amount of money. By this influence---and contrary to the 'promise' of TMAP---Pennsylvania jeopardized the health and
welfare of some of its most vulnerable citizens. At the same time, Pennsylvania incurred, via its adoption of TMAP and likewise contrary to TMAP's 'promise' of lower drug costs----rapidly escalating psychiatric pharmaceutical expenditures. These costs translated into the expensive misuse of atypical antipsychotics (Risperdal, Zyprexa, Seroquel, Abilify, and Geodon) and off-label misuse of anticonvulsant mood 'stabilizers' (Topamax, Trileptal, Neurontin, Gabitril, Lamictal, and others.).

As Ms. Carr correctly pointed out, part of the substance of my July 1st, 2004 Federal Complaint in the Middle District of Pennsylvania contains the above allegations. Should my Federal complaint not be short-circuited by judicial rulings in favor of the pharmaceutical companies who want the action dismissed prior to trial, I have documentation that will easily, and sadly, substantiate my allegations.

In Pennsylvania, there is another fact that continues to escape media attention. As readers will be aware, our previous governor, Thomas Ridge, was appointed by President George W. Bush to direct what became the Department of Homeland Security. Prior to Secretary Ridge assuming that post, Ridge appointed Gerald Radke, a former marketing director for Eli Lilly, to become Pennsylvania's Deputy Director of Mental Health and Substance Abuse. That position was 'open' because President Bush had just appointed Pennsylvania's previous occupant of that position, social worker Charles Curie, to head up SAMHSA, the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, under the aegis of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The implications of those appointments, in light of Ms. Carr's commentary, are considerable. President George W. Bush, Secretary Thomas Ridge, SAMHSA's Charles Curie and Pennsylvania's Gerald Radke are all on record strongly supporting the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health and TMAP.

For further updates on this matter, especially as they pertain to Texas, I would recommend Nanci Wilson's brilliant investigative reporting on KEYE-TV, a CBS affiliate in Austin, Texas. On September 30, 2004, that station aired her expose on TMAP. Her piece can currently be viewed on-line; it is time well-spent.

Separately, President Bush's brother, Florida's Governor Jeb Bush, is not exempt from issues related to TMAP. Florida endorses a TMAP look-alike program entitled the Florida Algorithm Project (FALGO, Greg Holeman, Project Director, Tallahassee, Florida.) With escalating costs, particularly those for atypical antipsychotics that are underwritten by Florida's Medicaid program, Jeb Bush has asked that
the state examine ways to decrease the projected significant increases in expenditures.

For my part, I continue to be an advocate for careful and judicious use of medication and non-medication therapies for individuals with bona fide psychiatric disorders who are carefully diagnosed and medically monitored by mental health professionals. Anything less than that is not good care, it is simply bad medicine. Government intrusion into this therapeutic alliance denigrates it.

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