

TO: Senate Committee on Universities, Technical Colleges, Children & Families
FROM: Smriti Khare M.D., President of Children's Medical Group at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin
DATE: Tuesday, May 7, 2019
RE: Support for SB 113—Statewide expansion of Wisconsin's Child Psychiatry Consultation Program

Good afternoon, Chairman Kooyenga and members of the committee. My name is Dr. Smriti Khare and I am the President of Children's Medical Group and Executive Leader for Mental and Behavioral Health at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to testify today in support of SB 113, which relates to expanding the Wisconsin Child Psychiatry Consultation Program.

We know that a child's mental health significantly impacts their overall health, well-being and development. Children's offers a comprehensive array of mental and behavioral services to children, youth and families at locations across the state. By integrating mental health care delivery in primary care and through valuable partnerships with the State, community organizations and schools, Children's has worked to increase pediatric access to mental and behavioral health care services. Children's mental health therapists have partnered with more than 30 schools around the state to offer services to children within the school setting to reduce common barriers to accessing care and increasing partnerships between therapists, teachers and parents.

As you know, together with support from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, the Medical College of Wisconsin and Children's jointly operate the Child Psychiatric Consultation Program (CPCP). I'd like to share stories that two of my colleagues passed onto me regarding the value and benefit of the CPCP to their practice.

Larissa Malmstadt, MD, a pediatrician at Children's Oklahoma Pediatrics, says that:

"Following my residency, I moved to central Maine to practice general pediatrics in a new place with very little support from pediatric subspecialists, including mental health professionals. I had to learn very quickly how to treat children for attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), depression and anxiety through literature and the help of my very capable partners. When I returned to Milwaukee, I felt rather confident in my abilities to care for these children, but was absolutely thrilled when the CPCP came into being.

Now I have immediate access to local child psychiatrists who can help me care for even more of these children and to assuage my fears when I have questions about things I am not sure of. I have something to offer families when waitlists seem interminable. I have trusted colleagues with whom to collaborate on my toughest cases. I cannot tell you how helpful this program has been for me and for my patients and their families and I am extremely grateful every day to know that these physicians are here to help this community."

Renee Szafir, MD, a pediatrician at Delafield Pediatrics, explains that:

“The CPCP has been an extremely valuable resource for me as a pediatrician. There is a significant shortage of mental health care providers in our area, and as a pediatrician, I feel it is my duty to be able to step in to help these children if mental health access is unavailable. Often, families prefer to stay with a provider they trust in their medical home, instead of traveling long distances to see specialists. And CPCP allows families to do just that. For me to be able to consult a psychiatrist or psychologist and then circle back to families with recommendations, they feel more confident in the treatment we are pursuing. The CPCP has built my knowledge on treating children with mental health concerns and I can refer back to all that I’ve learned throughout the years. Upon leaving residency, I felt very unsure about treating mental illness; now I feel like that it is one of my strengths – due in part to the resources from the CPCP team.

I always reflect on this patient experience. I had two new patients on my schedule, whom I thought were visiting for a routine health check. As it turned out, they had several mental health diagnoses and were on a large regimen of medications, most of which I did not feel comfortable managing. Their nurse practitioner who had been treating them was no longer able to provide care. They had tried to seek care at multiple offices with different pediatricians, however with their state insurance, they could not find anyone who would continue to prescribe their medications – medications that would be dangerous to stop abruptly. Rather than referring them to try yet another attempt to find a specialist, I utilized the CPCP. They helped guide me through prescribing their medications, advising as to what lab work was needed to make sure there were no serious side effects and helping me to care for these children with complex concerns. I touched base with the CPCP staff every month and they helped me safely care for the children until their care was transferred. The CPCP staff were even able to help me safely wean them off many of their medications they did not need, providing safe and effective care. This family was forever grateful to Children’s for being able to assist them. Both children are now doing very well in the care of a pediatric psychiatrist.”

As you’ve heard, the CPCP provides physicians in Wisconsin with the expert resources and education they need to provide their patients with timely and safe mental and behavioral health care. With the state’s increased support, CPCP would be able to expand access to these critical resources across the state. This would mean additional increases in access to mental and behavioral health care for more children and families in need.

Chairman Kooyenga and committee members, I thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 113. I am happy to answer any questions now. If you have any questions, comments or concerns after the hearing, please feel free to contact me via email at skhare@chw.org or via phone at 414-266-6405.

Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin (Children’s) serves children and families in every county across the state. We have inpatient hospitals in Milwaukee and the Fox Valley. We care for every part of a child’s health, from critical care at one of our hospitals, to routine checkups in our primary care clinics. Children’s Hospital also provides specialty care, urgent care, emergency care, dental care, school health nurses, foster care and adoption services, family resource centers, child health advocacy, health education, family preservation and support, mental health services, pediatric medical research and the statewide poison hotline.