

NEWS RELEASE

AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION

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APA Denounces New Health and Human Services Regulations

ARLINGTON, Va. (Dec. 22, 2008) –The American Psychiatric Association (APA) decries the enactment of new regulations by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to deny federal funding to health organizations that don't allow workers to refuse to provide medical services that they oppose on religious grounds. In these regulations, the onus is on the health care organization to prove that it allows workers to refuse to perform medical procedures such as abortion, sterilization and the providing of birth control pills to women. Workers may also refuse to provide in-vitro fertilization services to lesbians or single women.

Regulations have been in place for three decades that protect health care workers who don't wish to take part in abortions or sterilization techniques, but the new HHS rules, which were advocated by the Bush administration, go farther than ever before: They equate any process that interferes with a fertilized egg with abortion. This means that many forms of birth control, which prevent the egg from implanting in the womb, can be treated the same as an abortion. In addition, the rules protect not only doctors and nurses but pharmacists, medical technicians and even cashiers and janitors who refuse to perform some part of a service that is related to a procedure they disagree with.

“The American Psychiatric Association recognizes access to contraceptive and abortion services as essential to the well-being of women, their families and society at large,” said Nada L. Stotland, M.D., M.P.H., who is president of the APA. “These rules trample on the health of women and their families, and they violate the rights of both patients and health care professionals. Medical ethics demand that patients be given information about all legal options for their care and that that care be delivered in a timely enough fashion to forestall dangers to a patient's health,” she added.

Health care organizations that can't prove that they allow refusals on religious and moral grounds can have their federal funding cut off and may even have to return funds they have already received. The APA joins with several major medical societies, including the American Medical Association, the American Hospital Association and the National Association of Chain Drug Stores in opposing the new regulations.

The American Psychiatric Association is a national medical specialty society whose more than 38,000 physician members specialize in diagnosis, treatment, prevention and research of mental illnesses including substance use disorders.

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