

June 28, 2010

The Honorable Eugene L. Dodaro
Acting Comptroller General of the United States
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

RE: Nomination of Susan Mandel to Serve on the National Health Care Workforce Advisory Commission

Dear Acting Comptroller General Dodaro:

On behalf of the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare (National Council) and its member organizations – 1,700 Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) and other community-based mental health and addiction providers serving over 6 million low income children and adults with mental health and substance use disorders – the staff and the board are writing to nominate Susan Mandel, Ph.D. to serve on the National Health Care Workforce Advisory Commission.

The Commission's statutory charge is to examine workforce supply and demand, with the behavioral health workforce identified as a high priority area. It is well known that the U.S. behavioral health workforce faces a shortage of providers and other professionals, particularly for individuals in rural areas, children, and the elderly. These shortages will only become more pronounced as healthcare reform rolls out over the coming years. In particular, major Medicaid expansions and the growing focus on integration of care will place an increased burden on a workforce that is not sufficiently equipped to meet these new demands.

As the behavioral health workforce evolves and adapts to meet new demands, community behavioral health organizations will play a vital role in expanding access to mental health and addictions treatment services. **With major Medicaid expansions set to begin in 2014, more patients than ever before will need access to services from community behavioral health providers.** Community behavioral health centers are the backbone of the public mental health safety net, caring primarily for uninsured or Medicaid-eligible individuals. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Medicaid is the single largest purchaser of mental health care in the United States today. When Medicaid expands to cover all Americans under 133% of poverty in 2014, millions more individuals will have access to the community services our behavioral health centers provide. However, the community mental health and substance use disorder workforce is not currently equipped to meet this expected sharp increase in demand.

Moreover, new initiatives in healthcare reform that emphasize integration of care will require improved training and education for behavioral health and medical health professionals. Among the many new initiatives authorized in the healthcare reform law are several programs that seek to improve integration of care for all aspects of a person's health. However, primary care physicians are not uniformly trained in mental health and substance use disorders screening, referral, and/or treatment, nor are behavioral health professionals consistently able to forge connections with medical clinics for the treatment of low-income behavioral health patients with medical treatment needs. Persons with severe mental illnesses have a strikingly high incidence of co-occurring chronic diseases, including heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, cancer, asthma, and cardio-pulmonary conditions of every type – and only a tiny percentage of this population have regular access to primary care physicians. Clearly, enhanced workforce capacity, education, and training are needed to meet the high demand for integrated service delivery among patients with mental illness or substance use disorders. In the Commission's review of federal policies pertaining to workforce

education and training capacity, a community behavioral health professional can provide invaluable input and guidance on the need for enhanced behavioral health training in the primary care setting and for expanded behavioral health workforce capacity to assist with care integration and coordination.

Given the Commission's charge to formulate recommendations in the high-priority field of behavioral health workforce development, it is crucial for at least one Commission member to have extensive experience in the community behavioral health field. As you consider your appointments to the Commission, I urge you to select Dr. Susan Mandel, who has, throughout her long career as a clinical psychologist and community mental health center administrator, demonstrated unparalleled expertise in the issues affecting the behavioral health workforce. With over four decades of experience in both the public and private behavioral health sectors, Dr. Mandel is uniquely positioned to provide an expert perspective on the issues affecting the behavioral health workforce, both today and in the future.

For the last 30 years, Dr. Mandel has served as President and Chief Executive Officer of Pacific Clinics, a community behavioral health center in Pasadena, California. Pacific Clinics is a network of mental health centers with a staff of over 1200 and a budget of over \$94 million, serving five counties in Southern California. Dr. Mandel is well acquainted with the challenges of workforce recruitment, training, and retention. Over her three decades with Pacific Clinics, she oversaw initiatives to expand services, enhance staff capacity for the delivery of integrated care, and improve the cultural responsiveness of services provided at Pacific Clinics. Her many achievements include the implementation of an integrated services model for the treatment of co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders; the development of the Pacific Clinics Training Institute to enhance student and intern training efforts, consumer and community education, and staff development/enrichment programs; and the establishment of collaborative training programs that educated and encouraged clients and family members to become mental health workers, providing much needed paraprofessional personnel to offer effective services to consumers. Dr. Mandel is also a recognized leader in her state, having served on the California Mental Health Planning Council, the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health Comprehensive Community Care Steering Group, the State Steering Committee on Managed Care.

In determining the membership of the National Health Care Workforce Commission, the Comptroller General of the United States should select representatives from communities with particularly acute health workforce challenges. Dr. Susan Mandel, as a representative of the community behavioral health field, would provide valuable expertise and knowledge about the most critical workforce issues we must confront.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We are happy to provide you with any additional information you may need.

Sincerely,



Linda Rosenberg, MSW, President and CEO
National Council for Community Behavioral
Healthcare



William H. Kyles, Board Chair
National Council for Community Behavioral
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Neal Cash, President/CEO
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Tim Swinfard, President & CEO
Missouri Coalition of Community MH Centers

Frank Anselmo, CEO
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