

NAADAC testifies before the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health

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NAADAC, The Association for Addiction Professionals, testified before the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health yesterday and called for the development of an integrated, seamless system of care for patients with brain disorders.

"The failure to provide comprehensive treatment for co-occurring brain and other medical disorders, such as alcoholism, bi-polar disorder and HIV, ultimately leads to a worsening of the patient's condition and prevents him or her from returning to a functioning life," said John Avery, director of public policy for NAADAC.

Avery addressed the commission at the conclusion of its first series of meetings in Arlington, Va. The commission is conducting a comprehensive study of the U.S. mental health service delivery system. It will make recommendations to President Bush by April 29, 2003, suggesting improvements that will enable individuals with brain disorders to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities.

Avery urged the commission to focus on the needs of patients, not the needs of the delivery system. He made several recommendations.

"The public health model of prevention, early intervention and effective treatment should be at the core of the system," Avery said. "Discrimination by diagnosis is unacceptable. The brain deserves the same degree of care as any other organ system."

Avery stressed the importance of protecting current funding streams for addictive disorders treatment in today's tight budgetary climate for brain disorders.

"Robbing Peter to pay Paul will not provide the adequate resources to meet the challenge," Avery said. "The \$1.78 billion substance abuse block grant cannot be stretched to include medications and psychiatric services without cannibalizing services for patients with addictive disorders."