

## FACT SHEET

### House Bill 09-1341

**Title:** Concerning the Continuation of the Licensing of Psychiatric Technicians by the State Board of Nursing

**Sponsors:** Rep. Pace, Sen. Tapia

#### **Summary of Legislation:**

HB09-1341 continues the licensing and regulation of psychiatric technicians by the State Board of Nursing until July 1, 2019. Passage of this bill would preserve a unique profession in Colorado whose members perform a critical function caring for developmentally disabled patients and mentally ill people, including the criminally insane. The bill retains psychiatric technicians within the DORA sunset rotation, as requested by DORA. Without this legislation, licensed psychiatric technicians will begin a one-year phase-down July 1, 2009.

#### **Background:**

- There are approximately 1,200 licensed psychiatric technicians in Colorado. They care for patients at the Colorado Mental Health Institute at Pueblo for persons with mental illness and the state's Regional Centers for people with developmental disabilities. Many patients require round-the-clock care.
- The General Assembly created the Psychiatric Technician Practice Act in 1967 to ensure that properly trained personnel were available to care for patients in Colorado state institutions.
- In Colorado, only those holding a license can call themselves Psychiatric Technicians
- Prospective Psychiatric Technicians must complete a formal training program and pass a competency exam. They also do on-the-job training and continuing education training required by the Department of Human Services.

#### **Role of Licensed Psychiatric Technicians:**

- Ensure positive and safe outcomes for patients and staff.
- Fill a significant void created by the current shortage of Registered Nurses.
- Administer medications to residents of the Colorado Mental Health Institute at Pueblo and the Regional Centers. Without Psychiatric Technicians, it would cost the state more for nurses to administer such medications.
- Monitor side effects of medications and of suspected mental illness.
- Implement behavioral interventions as prescribed by psychiatric staff. Act as front-line observers at the regional centers and the state Mental Health

Institute on whether a particular treatment is effective or needs to be changed.

- When delegated to do so, provide health monitoring of blood glucose levels and blood pressure, occupational and speech therapies; also, bathe and dress patients; monitor vital signs; administer oxygen; insert catheters; care for wounds, feeding tubes, colostomies and perform a slew of other patient care.
- Prepare and implement specialized diets.
- Deal with dangerous patients and train on physical intervention and application of restraints.

**Preliminary Estimate of Increased staff costs for the Colorado Regional Centers if Licensed Psych Techs are replaced by Registered Nurses: \$5,498,640**

**There also would be an increase in costs for the Colorado Mental Health Institute if Licensed Psych Techs are replaced by Registered Nurses based on a comparison of average monthly salaries (Psych Techs are in the Health Care Tech Titles)**

CMHIP - CURRENT STAFF - 04/20/09	
TITLE	AVG Salaries
NURSE I	\$ 4,966.28
NURSE II	\$ 5,719.33
NURSE III	\$ 6,092.08
HEALTH CARE TECH I	\$ 2,875.91
HEALTH CARE TECH II	\$ 3,295.86
HEALTH CARE TECH III	\$ 3,404.21

The Colorado Department of Human Services anticipates it would be difficult to recruit Certified Nurse Aides or LPNs into the Institute setting. Many of these individuals want to utilize their skills in acute care medical hospitals and/or in skilled nursing facilities rather than in a psychiatric setting. The violence often presented by the Institute patient population and the challenges presented by severely disabled Regional Center clients provide unique, and often daunting, challenges to recruitment and retention of health care providers.

HB09-1341 will enable the Mental Health Institute and the Regional Centers to continue to utilize licensed psychiatric professionals to provide a unique skill set that is vital to meeting the needs of clients with a mental illness or a developmental disability.