



# Arkansas Psychological Association

---

P.O. Box 21220 Little Rock, AR 72221 (501) 614-6500 Fax (501) 224-0988 [www.arpapsych.org](http://www.arpapsych.org)

Hello, ArPA colleagues,

Two major events occurred last Monday, Nov. 7th. The APII Behavioral Health Workgroup occurred last Monday afternoon.

Earlier that morning, AR Surgeon General, Dr. Joe Thompson, from the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement (ACHI) hosted a health care reform summit at Children's Hospital. Panelists included physicians and Jay Bradford who have key roles in the 4 major parts of health care reform in AR.

Visit <http://www.achi.net> to read all about the health care reform activities in the state.

Here are the highlights of that summit entitled "Building a Better Arkansas Health System for the 21st Century":

AR's health and economy are closely linked. 1/2 of adults in AR have chronic diseases, 33% of Arkansans don't have health insurance, 4/10 Arkansas hospitals are in the red, we have aging PCPs and an aging population. Also, there are stark health disparities in AR: There is a 10 year difference in life expectancy from the healthiest and unhealthiest counties in Arkansas.

Considering these factors, health reform activities are being driven by issues specific to our state and not just because of the Affordable Care Act. We are on an unsustainable path on our current health care system.

4 activities are occurring to address our current challenges:

1. The implementation of electronic health records (EHRs) across Arkansas. This will reduce medical errors, duplicate, unnecessary, and poorly coordinated care. Physicians can receive incentive payments for adopting EHRs. However, psychologists are not included in these incentive payments, though it appears we'll need to eventually adopt EHRs too--at least that is what appears to be the case. APAPO is advocating for psychologists to be included in the HITECH ACT incentive payments. The AR Foundation for Medical Care is the body that provides incentive payments to PCPs for adopting EHRs.
2. Strategic Workforce Plan: ACHI is developing a workforce plan to staff the patient centered medical homes (PCMHs). This will involve team based care including the use of non-physician providers to eliminate gaps in quality of health care delivery. The goal is to "stretch the capacity of workers in our healthcare system to their optimum level and to provide services to according to the full scope of their practice." This means more APNs, more RNs, more pharmacists, more health educators, more health IT people.

This also entails integrating behavioral health providers. Dr Kevin Rowell and Dr Lisa McNeir are consulting with ACHI on the integration of behavioral health, and specifically psychology, in the PCMHs. Thank you, Kevin and Lisa!

3. The health insurance exchange will not occur on a state level. It will occur on a federal level--Jay Bradford, our insurance commissioner, has worked very hard to develop the exchange on the state level, but that's not going to be the case. He will keep us informed about the Health Insurance Exchange as that is designed at the federal level.

4. The current fee for service system has not been effective in reducing health care costs. According to Dr Thompson, AR could cut reimbursement rates across the board in the current fee for service system, or transform the care delivery and payment system to stay in line with current reimbursement levels. That is the goal of the Arkansas Payment Improvement Initiative. The goal of the APII is to pay reasonable rates for coordinated care and to encourage cost control and reduce inefficiency among providers. There will be a big focus on prevention of illnesses over the next few years to help contain costs. ArPA is involved in the behavioral health workgroup in the APII (see yesterday's update).

Some questions that were raised at the summit: Whose money is being saved with cost cutting activities? How will these reform efforts work for independent providers in terms of how we provide services? How will this impact reimbursement for independent providers? Dr. Thompson could not answer these questions, but he acknowledged the anxiety that many health care providers are feeling.

Bottom line, there will be big changes within the next few years, but no one is sure what this will all look like, since Arkansas is at the vanguard of health care reform in the country. This was verified to me from the perspective of APA, where no other workgroup activity like this is occurring yet in other states. While this process is anxiety provoking, it's also a great opportunity for psychologists to advocate for our skills and expertise and hopefully have a positive impact on the healthcare reform in Arkansas.

Thank you,

Leslie