Autism Commission Sub-Committee for Children Birth to Three Years Old-Meeting Minutes

September 30, 2016, 1:00pm-2:30pm

NECC

Ron Benham, the Chair called the meeting to order at 1:05 pm and welcomed the members to the meeting of this Sub-Committee. Carolyn Kain, Executive Director of the Autism Commission asked members to vote to approve the minutes from the last meeting. The members present were Ron Benham, Rafael Castro Ph.D., Vinnie Strully, Rob Polsinelli, Dr. Diana Parry-Cruwys, Carolyn Kain, Dianne Lescinskas, Dr. Ann Neumeyer, and Joan Rafferty.

The meeting began with introductions. Each member of the sub-committee introduced themselves and described their work with children with ASD birth to three years old. Vinny invited committee members to the NECC dedication and celebration on October 17th.

Ron talked about Early Intervention and the models of service. 16 providers, all but 2 are ABA focused, 2DRI floor time. Vinny asked when the State is paying for the services are they allowed to tell the families their choice is the evidence based model. Ron responded that the EI program holds the contract with the specialty provider.

Ron discussed the insurance rate change – 3.5% increase on 3/1. Mass Health expansion – the EI rate in late May is retroactive to 3/1. Blue Cross had a different coding system and their impact was in the double digits. DPH did not get any additional funding and contractual relationships will be enforced. Amy Weinstock and others are looking into the larger employers that do not cover or partially cover. DPH will typically make up the difference. Secretary Sudders is interested in looking at this data - $30 million FY17 for autism services - $24/$25 million FY17 for regular EI services. DPH pays for services for the uninsured and for those self-insured who choose not to insure these services. Vinny asked if Mass Health pays and Ron responded that yes they do. Carolyn said there is a big effort now to get the self-insured to start paying. There is an inequity – the state is paying when these large corporations can afford to pay.

Dr. Castro asked if our sub-committee could play a role in advocating for the larger self-employers to cover the EI and ABA costs. Ron is concerned about making funding recommendations. There are advocacy groups that could do this work – AFAM and Mass. Advocates. They could lobby around the rates and to also get more qualified people in this field and that would encourage more graduate programs. A question was asked about this sub-committee voting on financial matters. Carolyn responded that she would talk to the secretary about this issue. Ron commented that the EI consortium is a great advocacy program and the challenge to our group, or the commission as a whole would be to ask them to advocate on this issue. AFAM needs to come to the hearings where the rates are set. Providers and their clients need to also advocate.

DPH serves 2000 kids in the 16 EI centers and it is growing 10% each year. There are 36 kids served by NECC and the average age for diagnosis at NECC is 26 months.

Joan stated that she is working on a grant with Elaine Gabovich from UMass Medical. They are working toward early detection with videos in multiple languages to reach more families, although, there are not enough providers for all of the newly diagnosed. Carolyn stated they are working on this issue with the Workforce Development Sub-Committee. Ron asked about doing loan forgiveness to encourage more folks in this field.

Models and intensity of services was brought up by the group – it was discussed that parents can make a choice on services and that you can’t limit parent choice completely. Vinny does not agree with parental choice especially if some programs are state funded. He said that parents should understand the long term benefits of ABA. Joan said they empower parents with choice at EI and they work hard with families to ensure they have a full understanding of the information. Vinny said if you persuade them with acting now on more intensive services you can save down the line.

Ron talked about the EI Advisory Meetings – the specialty sub-committee is meeting on November 17th.

Carolyn discussed prioritizing what types of recommendations we want to present. Ron said we should review the potential for statutory change for a child under 5 to receive ABA and look at specific advocacy groups regarding rate review.

The group talked about dates for their next meeting and there was discussion around late November or early December. Ron said he will be in touch with a proposed date for the next meeting. There being no further business, upon motion duly made, seconded and approved, the Chair Mr. Benham adjourned the meeting at about 2:30pm.