

Support Recognizing Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) as a Serious Mental Illness

From: The Honorable Barbara Comstock

May 2017

The Honorable Thomas Price, M.D.
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20201

RE: Recognizing Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) as a Serious Mental Illness as Listed in the 21st Century Cures Act

Dear Mr. Secretary,

In recognition of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) Awareness Month, we write to request that you identify BPD as a serious mental illness among the provisions of the 21st Century Cures Act, signed into law on December 13, 2016. BPD is characterized by the brain's inability to process and respond to normal emotions often resulting in severe instability, impulsive behaviors, distorted thinking, chaotic relationships, and self-harm. Further:

- BPD affects up to 6 of every 100 Americans (1.6 to 5.9% of the population);
- Up to 10% of individuals with BPD lose their lives to suicide;
- Up to 75% of individuals with BPD attempt suicide during the course of their illness
- 25-50% of prison inmates have BPD;
- 50-80% of those with BPD also have a co-occurring substance abuse disorder;

- BPD represents nearly 20% of admissions to psychiatric hospitals and outpatient clinics; and
- Family, relationships, employment, and social functioning are impacted by BPD.

Despite these statistics and despite the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) listing BPD as a serious mental illness, both the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) omit reference to BPD on their respective web pages which describe the most common and pervasive mental health illness in the United States. Further, BPD was not specifically named in the 21st Century Cures Act. Title XII, Section 11001 of the legislation states, in part:

“The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration defines the term ‘serious mental illness’ as an illness affecting individuals 18 years of age or older as having, at any time in the past year, a diagnosable mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder that results in serious functional impairment and substantially interferes with or limits one or more major life activities. In reporting on the incidence of serious mental illness, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration includes major depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and other mental disorders that cause serious impairment.”

Individuals with BPD have been the victims of stigma and discrimination by health care professionals due to a lack of medical education and research about BPD. The government has an opportunity to change this now by identifying BPD as a serious mental illness. Evidence-based treatments for BPD exist and are successful, but many Americans cannot afford BPD treatment. By properly and uniformly identifying BPD as a serious mental illness on its websites with the same level of attention

afforded to major depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder, the federal government will take an important step to reduce stigma and increase access to treatment for Americans negatively impacted by this illness.

We respectfully request confirmation that the Department of Health and Human Services, SAMHSA, CDC, NIMH, and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services each consider BPD as being among the “other mental disorders that cause serious impairment” and that it will be reflected as such in future studies of serious mental illnesses. Should this be the case, the provisions addressing serious mental illness in the 21st Century Cures Act—namely Sections 6031, 11001, 11003, and 12003—should be extended to patients and families dealing with BPD as they would be to those dealing with major depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder.

Thank you in advance for consideration of this request. As always, we ask that this matter be handled in strict accordance with existing rules, regulations, and ethical guidelines. We look forward to your response, as well as a response from each of the agencies mentioned in this letter, describing the manner in which BPD will be addressed in relation to the 21st Century Cures Act.

Sincerely,

(Members of Congress Sign Here)

cc:

The Honorable Seema Verma, Administrator, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)

Kana Enomoto, M.A., Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary,
Substance Abuse and Mental

Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Anne Schuchat, M.D., Acting Director, Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention (CDC)

Joshua A. Gordon M.D., Ph.D., Director, National Institute of
Mental Health (NIMH)