

# Jefferson Hospital doctor serves as panelist for mental health legislation

By [Patrick Cloonan](#)

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Mental health legislation promoted by U.S. Rep. Tim Murphy, R-Upper St. Clair, got a boost on Tuesday from a fellow psychologist in the 18th Congressional District.

“At Jefferson Hospital, we are dependent upon computer technology to provide timely scoring and reporting of our psychological testing,” Dr. Joseph F. Cvitkovic, director of behavioral health care at the Jefferson Hills facility, told a Senate staff briefing in Washington.

The American Psychological Association chose Cvitkovic as one of three panelists giving the Behavioral Health Information Technology Coalition advice as they seek to give behavioral health providers and facilities access to Medicare and Medicaid incentive payments.

Chris Wolf, CEO of ViaQuest in Columbus, Ohio, and Ginger Bandedeen, quality improvement manager for Columbia Community Mental Health Center in St. Helens, Ore., joined Cvitkovic in offering testimony. Salt Lake County Mayor Ben McAdams moderated the briefing.

The coalition is pressing for bills meant to amend the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health or HITECH Act of 2009 to aid behavioral health specialists.

“With the use of health information technology, we are better able to receive relevant treatment information on patients coming to the Emergency Department from our outpatient behavioral health providers and primary care physicians,” Cvitkovic said.

One bill cited by the coalition is the Behavioral Health Information Technology Act, sponsored as Senate Bill 1517 by Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., and as House of Representatives Bill 2957 by Murphy and Rep. Ron Barber, D-Ariz.

HR 2957 was referred to a House health subcommittee a year ago. It since has been rolled over into Murphy's HR 3717 or Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act, which Murphy introduced in December and aired at a House subcommittee hearing in April.

Murphy said an oversight subcommittee he chairs found in January 2013 an electronic medical records gap between doctors and mental health professionals. He said it is part of a larger problem.

“My investigation into our nation's broken mental health system uncovered a gaping hole that lies between primary care and mental health providers,” Murphy said on Tuesday. “The Helping Families in Mental Health Crisis Act will integrate care and improve the quality of treatment for the severely mental ill, who are at a greater risk of suffering from costly chronic conditions like stroke, heart disease and diabetes.”

In Allegheny Health System, which includes Jefferson Hospital, Cvitkovic said, “we have worked to integrate medical and behavioral health services with much success. In turn, when a patient comes to us in crisis, we are able to quickly receive medical record information regarding current and past medications, current medical problems and relevant counseling and therapy information.”

Also addressed at Tuesday's briefing was the Behavioral Health Information Coordination Act of 2013 or Senate Bill 1685 sponsored by Sen. Rob Portman, R-Ohio. That bill was referred to the Senate Finance Committee in November 2013 and remains there.

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