

**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES – DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH**

**F A C T S H E E T**

**APPROVAL TO INCREASE THE CONTRACTED RATE FOR  
FOUR EXISTING TEMPORARY PSYCHIATRIST SERVICES AGREEMENTS  
WITH LOCUM TENENS CONTRACTORS  
(SUPERVISORIAL DISTRICT 5)  
(3 VOTES)**

**SUBJECT**

Request approval to increase the contracted rate (daily and hourly) for Locum Tenens (LT) contractors who find psychiatrists to work in the Antelope Valley during periods of critical psychiatrist staffing shortage. This increase will provide LT contractors with a more competitive contracted rate for servicing the Antelope Valley when the Department of Mental Health (DMH) experiences extreme difficulty with recruitment and retention of permanent psychiatrists in the Antelope Valley.

**REQUEST**

1. Approve and instruct the Director of Mental Health or his designee to prepare and execute amendments to existing Temporary Psychiatrist Services Agreements with four (4) LT contractors, Interim Physicians, Medsource Consultants, Jackson & Coker, and National Medical Registry. The Amendment will increase the contracted rate from \$1,050 per day (\$131.25 hourly rate) to \$1,600 per day (\$200 hourly rate) for LT contractors who find psychiatrists during periods of critical shortage to work in the Antelope Valley, an extremely difficult-to-recruit geographic area. Funding for the increased contracted rate is derived from utilization of vacant budgeted psychiatrist positions.
2. Delegate authority to the Director of Mental Health or his designee to prepare and execute future new agreements with prospective, qualified LT contractors and future amendments to agreements, provided that: 1) the County's payments to each contractor under the Agreement for each fiscal year shall not exceed an increase of 20 percent from the applicable contracted rates; 2) any increase shall be used to meet program needs; 3) the Board of Supervisors has appropriated sufficient funds for all changes; 4) approval of County Counsel and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or their designee is obtained prior to the execution of any such amendment; and 5) the Director of Mental Health provides written notification to your Board within 30 days after the execution of any Amendment.

## **PURPOSE/JUSTIFICATION**

Board approval is required to allow DMH to provide LT contractors with a more competitive contracted daily rate for the provision of LT psychiatrists in the Antelope Valley, on an as-needed basis, to meet DMH's emergent and unanticipated needs when it experiences a serious psychiatrist shortage and cannot fill vacant positions expeditiously with permanent new hires in the Antelope Valley. This LT contracted rate increase will apply to the Antelope Valley only during periods of critical shortage based upon DMH's ongoing monitoring of existing psychiatrist vacancy rates, length of time of unanticipated absences/vacancies, active caseloads, and the inability to arrange for permanent psychiatrist employees to voluntarily provide temporary coverage.

The department-wide Mental Health Psychiatrist vacancy rate currently is 17 percent. However, the Antelope Valley is experiencing an overall 38 percent vacancy rate for Mental Health Psychiatrists, which is higher than any other service area. DMH has experienced difficulty recruiting psychiatrists to fill permanent positions in the Antelope Valley, primarily due to its remote location and the commuting distance from the Los Angeles metropolitan area. This critically high vacancy rate has made it extremely difficult to provide uninterrupted access to mental health services for clients especially when one or more psychiatrists are absent.

On November 6, 2007, your Board approved an increased LT contracted rate of \$1,050 per day (\$131.25 hourly rate) for child and adolescent psychiatrists and general psychiatrists assigned to difficult-to-recruit work sites, which included the Antelope Valley. Since then, the four (4) existing LT contractors with whom DMH has agreements have been unable to successfully recruit qualified psychiatrists/subcontractors to work at directly operated locations in the Antelope Valley. The reason for this LT recruitment difficulty is attributed to independent contractor psychiatrists' acceptance of temporary work assignments with other LT agencies that contract with the California State Prison in Lancaster, which pays a significantly higher hourly reimbursement rate range of \$188.50 to \$200 per hour.

Board approval of a \$1,600 per day rate is justified for LT contractors who subcontract with psychiatrists who are willing to accept a work assignment in the Antelope Valley. This \$550 daily rate increase (\$68.75 hourly rate increase) is consistent with the prevailing LT contracted rate structure offered by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR).

## **BACKGROUND**

In July 2000, facing a vacancy rate of 30 percent for Mental Health Psychiatrists, DMH developed a multi-pronged Enhanced Psychiatrist Recruitment Program to attract candidates and to improve the hiring process. Despite the success of this intensive recruitment program and the consistent utilization of advanced step placements for qualified new hires, the Department has continued to experience extreme difficulty recruiting Mental Health Psychiatrists to fill permanent positions in the Antelope Valley.

During the last three years, DMH has made contact with approximately 450 psychiatrist candidates and hired about 100 of these individuals. However, due to the location of the work sites in the Antelope Valley, the majority of the potential candidates were not willing to consider working in that geographic area. Of the 450 candidates, only 16 (3.5 percent) were willing to consider interviewing in the Antelope Valley. Of the new hires, only two (2 percent) were hired to work in the Antelope Valley.

Recruitment of Mental Health Psychiatrists has become more difficult countywide since CDCR authorized significantly higher salaries as of January 1, 2007 for correctional personnel, including psychiatrists, as a result of a Federal court mandate.

The Antelope Valley, which is located in Supervisorial District 5 and Mental Health Service Area 1, continues to experience a critically high vacancy rate (38 percent) and is seriously impacted by the inability to recruit and retain permanent psychiatrists. To deal with this critical psychiatrist staffing shortage in the Antelope Valley, DMH has attempted to improve the situation by asking Mental Health Psychiatrists assigned to other DMH sites to voluntarily provide critically needed psychiatric coverage either by working overtime or by rotating days/splitting time between their regular worksite and the Antelope Valley site. Mileage reimbursement and paid travel time from their regular assigned site to the Antelope Valley site have been offered. To date, other than the Department's Medical Director and Regional Medical Directors, only one of more than 200 psychiatrists has volunteered to commute and temporarily provide services as needed in the Antelope Valley. Even if additional Mental Health Psychiatrists were to volunteer, this temporary measure could reduce the ability of psychiatrists from other sites to serve their existing patients, impose a strain on their colleagues' caseloads, and potentially undermine the mental health system overall by negatively impacting access to psychiatric services. The Department has chosen to ask for volunteers rather than assigning psychiatrists to provide coverage, since DMH believes that such action could negatively affect retention and threaten the success of its recruitment program.

Although the Department has a high vacancy rate (41 percent) in Supervisorial District 2 and Mental Health Service Area 6, DMH has been successful in obtaining and utilizing

LT psychiatrists whenever requested or utilizing permanent psychiatrist employees to voluntarily provide temporary coverage.

### **CONTRACTING PROCESS**

Since July 1, 2001, DMH has utilized the services of LT contractors to provide qualified psychiatrists, on a temporary and intermittent basis, to perform psychiatric evaluations, medication support, and crisis intervention to Seriously Mentally Ill adults, Seriously Emotionally Disturbed children, adolescents, and their families. The use of these LT contractors' subcontracted psychiatrists, on an as-needed basis, is necessary to meet emergent or unanticipated needs when existing County employees are unavailable, cannot be transferred from other locations, or vacant positions cannot be filled expeditiously with permanent new hires.

### **DMH CONTACT**

Roderick Shaner, M.D., Medical Director  
Office of the Medical Director  
Los Angeles County-Department of Mental Health  
Telephone Number: (213) 738-4603  
E-mail: [rshaner@dmh.lacounty.gov](mailto:rshaner@dmh.lacounty.gov)