



ENA Member to Testify at Senate Committee Hearing on Need for Comprehensive Mental Health Legislation

(January 20, 2016) – [Emergency Nurses Association](#) (ENA) member Penny Blake, RN, CCRN, CEN, of North Palm Beach, Florida, has been selected to testify this week at the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee hearing titled, “[Improving the Federal Response to Challenges in Mental Health Care in America](#).”

Blake is an emergency nurse at Good Samaritan Medical Center, an acute care community hospital in West Palm Beach, Florida. In addition, she is chair of Government Affairs for the Florida Emergency Nurses Association and chair of the ENA Advocacy Advisory Committee.

Blake has been a registered nurse for nearly 40 years and an emergency nurse for 18 years. She will speak from personal experience about why it is critical that legislators modernize and provide additional resources for the mental healthcare system. More specifically, she will address how mental health patients are both resource- and personnel-intensive for hospital emergency departments. In addition, mental health patients are cared for in the emergency department for much longer than other patients. [Research](#) conducted by ENA found that the average boarding time in the emergency department for psychiatric patients is 18 hours, versus only four hours for most other emergency patients. Mental health patients also often require close supervision and, if available, personalized medical attention.

Blake will highlight how inadequate community mental health services and extended boarding times are detrimental to the care received by mental health patients. She will discuss concrete steps that can be taken to provide these patients with better treatment alternatives.

“Caring for the mentally ill is a top ENA legislative issue,” said 2016 ENA President Kathleen E. Carlson, MSN, RN, CEN, FAEN. “An estimated 26.2 percent of Americans 18 and older suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder. That’s a huge number — more than 1 in 4 American adults. It affects virtually every American family. Yet, access to mental health care treatment is severely lacking. As a result, behavioral health patients often turn to emergency departments for care, putting added strain on emergency services.”

The hearing will commence at 10 a.m., Wednesday, in Room 430 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building.

Other panelists scheduled to testify are:

- Brian M. Hepburn, MD, Executive Director, National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, Alexandria, Virginia
- William W. Eaton, PhD, Professor, Department of Mental Health, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, Maryland
- Hakeem Rahim, EdM, MA, CEO, Live Breathe LLC, Let’s Talk Mental Illness, National Alliance on Mental Illness, Hempstead, New York

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About the Emergency Nurses Association

The Emergency Nurses Association (ENA) is the premier professional nursing association dedicated to defining the future of emergency nursing through advocacy, education, research, innovation, and leadership. Founded in 1970, ENA has proven to be an indispensable resource to the global emergency nursing community. With more than 40,000 members worldwide, ENA advocates for patient safety, develops industry-leading practice standards and guidelines, and guides emergency healthcare public policy. ENA members have expertise in triage, patient care, disaster preparedness, and all aspects of emergency care. Additional information is available at www.ena.org.