

Mr. Gary Bailey, MSW, ACSW – Chair  
NASW Public Education Campaign  
NASW – Tennessee Chapter  
1808 West End Avenue, Suite 1214  
Nashville, Tennessee 37203

Dear Mr. Bailey,

I am a social work undergraduate student at UTC and recently attended the 2007 Social Work Legislative Conference in Nashville. While I enjoyed the conference speakers and presentations by social work programs in various universities, I would like to suggest the addition of continuing education conferences or workshops focusing on the older adult population.

According to research in the older adult population, there is a significant shortage of social workers in the field at the present time. This problem will only intensify as the “baby boomers” continue to gray in America. Older adults, over age 65, makeup 12.8% of the population and their percentage continues to rise; however, there is evidence that older adults are underserved with mental health services.

Depression of older adults is particularly hard to diagnose because of comorbidity of illnesses or disease. It has also been found that the majority of older adults are first seen diagnosed by primary care physicians. Since the majority of primary care physicians are open to gaining more education in the area of elder care and will probably seek the help of social workers to be a part of care-management teams in the future, I believe it would be beneficial to offer continuing education courses to social workers who belong to NASW and extend the invitation to any primary care physicians or other interested professionals such as nurses, therapists, etc., who have an interest in becoming better equipped in diagnosing and treating this population.

Adding continuing educational conferences and workshops could be a continuing step for NASW to collaborate with the Tennessee Coalition for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Tennessee Association of Mental Health Organizations (TAMHO) and the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) in efforts to advocate for professional mental health services to needs of persons with mental health disorders.

Thank you for your time and consideration of adding conferences or workshops focusing on mental health issues of older adults to our current agenda.

Sincerely,

Joan Benefield  
Chattanooga, Tennessee