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**Mental Health Testimony**  
**Michigan Mental Health and Wellness Commission**  
**September 6, 2013, Sandusky, MI**

My premise:

Mentally ill people do not always use their privacy rights responsibly. They may be inclined to hide their conditions, making it impossible for their loved ones to know how to help them. Therefore, I think their privacy rights should be modified.

- Our experience:

Daughter-in-law with mental problems.

She was hospitalized 7 times during their 12 year marriage for being suicidal, and once for substance abuse. We eventually found out she had tried to kill herself when she was about 17. She also has been obsessed with her own health, complaining of all kinds of pain, and has become addicted to prescription pain medications.

- Family not involved in diagnosis or treatment plans.

Our son is now deceased, but to the best of my knowledge, he was never brought into any discussions of his wife's mental health or given any explanations of her illness or treatment.

- Actually preventing family from knowing.

Their family became more and more isolated from the rest of us. Her aunt tried to help her, so she had her put on the HIPAA paperwork. A short time later, she got mad and took her off.

- Manipulation.

A therapist told us that she only knows what the patient tells her. We have watched our son's wife try to turn people against each other, and otherwise manipulate situations. In this case, there was a person in the school office who felt sorry for my daughter-in-law, and excused over 60 attendance infractions in 1 yr. When she went to Brighton Hospital for 3 weeks, my son expected to be called to participate in group meetings and for visiting hours. She did not call once. She also threatened her husband that if he left her he'd never see his kids again.

- Neglect of children.

Some examples: Not thinking to feed her family until she, herself, got hungry. Not getting all of children's immunizations. When told by health dep't that child needed an eye exam, sent her to school with a pair of reading glasses from drugstore. When we got guardianship, this same 7 yr old child had 3 abscessed baby teeth & needed 9 fillings. The dentist said it was child neglect. Letting dirty dishes sit around until moldy. Sleeping, leaving toddlers unsupervised. Driving with children while under the influence of drugs. Only providing math tutor while judge was watching, discontinuing when

guardianship was terminated. Not getting children to school. Not even teaching children to write their names.

- No sharing of information between schools, medical, health insurance companies, mental health, judicial system, families, including: everybody's afraid of a lawsuit.

Their doctor had treated the whole family for 4 years. He told us he was relieved when we took the children, but couldn't tell us why. When we got involved at school and 2 & 2 were added up, the school administration became wary of us, even telling their main office not to talk to us. Our daughter-in-law said she had been diagnosed with bi-polar disorder, but no mental health worker told our son about it. We tried to tell the probate judge all these things, and begged him to look into her background, but he didn't. Instead, he returned the children to their mother, who, in addition to all her other problems, is now a single parent.

- Child caring for parent and sibling, feeling responsible.

The first child was only 2 years old when her sister was born. Her father worked full time, took all the overtime he could, and did all the things a mother usually does. She has had to look out for her little sister, including finding something for her to eat. The two children are very close, and I know the older one, especially, worries about her mother. One time, when she was living with us, she said, "I feel like a kid again!"

- Encouraging child to be ill and mentally unbalanced, including: suspicion of Munchausen's Syndrome & Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy.

We suspect our daughter-in-law has Munchausen's Syndrome, and now we see her keeping her 13 year old home from school for all kinds of vague aches and pains. She had over 40 attendance infractions last year. She has had an ultrasound of the child's kidneys, a scope of her stomach, has had her antidepressant changed, (which she has taken successfully since the age of 8) and had her put on anti-anxiety medication. She acts very concerned that her daughter is in pain.

- Creating another sick person just like herself.

Every time we saw our granddaughter this summer, she was depressed, worried about everything she could imagine, refusing to go outside with her old friends, avoiding new situations, saying she doesn't feel well, and crying hysterically. When I saw her two weeks ago, she cried, and told me that she's afraid they're going to be taken away from their mother again, and tried to assure me that "She's better now!"

- My final thoughts.

So, therefore, not only can we not help our daughter-in-law with her problems, but she is in the process of creating another person just like herself. Because everything is secret, the mentally ill person continues to create havoc in his own and his family's lives. It is inconceivable to me that a mentally ill person's right to privacy should take precedence over his child's rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." How can we allow this to happen to the very most vulnerable and dependent citizens in our society?