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It is important to improve delivery of services and more quality of services in mental health, so there needs to be serious concern about the path to entry for qualified workers. The educational and clinical requirements to be a mental health professional must be acknowledged, respected, and properly compensated.

In most cases, it takes an advanced degree such as a Master's in addition to internships (mostly unpaid), passing a test to be licensed in the state of residency, supervisory hours requirements for at least 2 years, and needing to pay for registration of license and obtaining continuing education credits just to remain qualified.

I will focus on licensed Social Workers; i.e., those who have passed at least the first licensed exam to be an LMSW.

Eliminate barriers on the front end to certify Social Workers such as

1. create a nationwide exam that upon passing will allow licensed. Master Social Workers to work across state lines, in the way that nurses do currently.
2. Have reciprocal agreements with other states to allow social workers to practice.
3. ensure that there are more opportunities for Social Workers to earn clinical hours towards eligibility to take clinical exam.
4. Consider that social workers are valuable team members regardless of their work setting. There are positions in executive or administrative positions requiring an RN license, which can easily be filled to excellence by a Licensed Master Social Worker.
5. compensation should be elevated to reflect the amount of years of education, internships, in many cases student loans that was required just to get entry level into the Social Worker profession.
6. Student loan forgiveness, expanded compensation when needing to be supervised for clinical hours.

7. to increase retention, and increase worker availability and burnout, reduce the amount of caseload quotas, appointments per worker, to allow built-in time to research, prepare treatment plans, and deliver services better quality of care.

To summarize, preparing for a career in mental health requires advanced study and proof of clinical work as well. This is not a volunteer position nor should it be treated as such. Treat the workers with respect, and value them as members of the team, ensure they are protected in their working environment, then it will go a long way in helping us to increase quality of service and the amount of those who would be willing and able to help those in need of mental health care.

Thank you for your consideration.