

Closing Remarks of Phillip Saperia
2014 Leadership Awards Reception
Coalition of Behavioral Health Agencies
June 19, 2014

Dr. Bassett's view of public health as social justice has energized me ever since I read about it in "Capitol Today" immediately after her appointment as Commissioner. As I thought about it, I realized that social justice is what our members, and most of you here tonight, are deeply engaged in every day.

We call it service provision, treatment, care coordination, support, rehabilitation, housing of all kinds, emergency response, crisis response, respite, family engagement, clubhouse, care giving, outreach.....these are so much more than delivery of services and responses to need.

These are acts of repairing the world. They are acts of kindness and compassion; they are acts of equality and solidarity with people who are least able to help themselves. They are acts of empowerment and acts that give hope—and even life.

Behavioral health, as we all know is inextricably and inevitably linked to public and personal health. It is an evidence based fact that what happens above the neck deeply affects the conditions below the neck (and sometimes vice versa). Whole body health is what we need to focus upon. When people are suffering problems that have their origins in the mind, it makes them feel and be more vulnerable, putting them at risk for more serious illnesses. What you/we do is care focused and values driven. This work is the work of social justice. What you do for those who are vulnerable and needy, impacts the entire health of individuals, communities and whole populations.

The Coalition will continue to be ever watchful as the speeding bullet train we are riding moves toward the destination of managed care. We will make our voice heard wherever and whenever we must to impact the transition in our system of care. We will be protective and continue to assist our social safety net to be ready for the new world, because you/we know how to help people in this crucial realm of the human body and in life.

Importantly, we will keep working to help our folks collaborate with each other and with new partners. We will continue to assist them to understand and operate fully in the new business models that will face them. We will not shirk from these professional tasks.

Above all, The Coalition's critical involvement is to preserve and extend that social justice system that our members embody and that we represent. Social justice is an understanding of critical social values like equality of opportunity and recognizing the dignity of every human being. It is about making space for hope and recovery. It is about everyone, rich or poor, whatever your backgrounds. It has its roots in religion, in humanism, in secular human rights movements—all that uphold human dignity and the right for all to good holistic treatment and care.

We commit ourselves to this mission because it is right and because we are inspired by the daily acts of caring and commitment of our members, our allies in government, the advocacy world and the larger healthcare community. We are proud to stand with you.

I will take this moment to thank my fellow travelers and Coalition colleagues who professionally and personally work unsparingly to uplift that gold standard of caring: Pat Goldstein, Karyn Krampitz, Heather Mermel, Chris Bianchi, Nanci Bradshaw, Naomi Weinstein, Amanda Saake, Deborah Short, Pat Feinberg, Elizabeth Saenger, Margie Staker, Grace Mercado, and Eduardo Ronquillo. Let me also welcome our newest staff member in the policy and advocacy arena, Jamin Sewell.

We have a leadership of excellence, Executive Committee and Board, who collaborate with staff and members to help us hold to the values we all care about. They help us keep our eyes on the target.

I have learned over the years, that the heart of this event is the camaraderie and collegiality that takes place away from the rostrum, around food and drink; involves schmoozing, hand shaking and hugging. So I have kept my remarks short tonight.

I leave you with this quote from Margaret Meade: ***“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”***

Thank YOU!