

Lawmaker's struggles frame insurance parity debate

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MADISON (WKOW) -- A lawmaker's struggle to fund his alcohol and drug treatment has become part of the debate over a proposal to bring parity to insurance coverage in the state.

The proposal to do away with lower coverage limits on treatment of mental disease and alcohol and drug addiction passed the assembly health committee, after years of failure for similar proposals.

The approval came a day after Rep. Jeff Wood (I-Chippewa Falls) announced his battle with addiction after three, recent operating while intoxicated arrests included an insurance denial for AODA treatment.

"We need to treat addiction," the proposal's author, Rep. Sandy Pasch (D-Whitefish Bay) told WKOW27 News.

"It is a cost effective thing to do. Not treating addiction has huge social costs."

In revealing the insurance denial and his decision to pay for his own treatment, Wood also called for more funding of alcohol and drug treatment. But Wood has failed to sign on as a supporter of Pasch's bill, nor on a bill in the senate with similar parity provisions.

Rep. Kitty Rhoades (R-Hudson) feared requiring more insurance coverage for the employees of businesses with as few as a dozen workers would be too burdensome, especially during a recession. Rhoades said the costs of forcing health care providers to cover mental health in the same fashion as other medical ills need to be finalized.

"We are still waiting to see what the feds are going to do with the entire health care world, and we really need to sit back, watch that and figure out what we can afford to do."

A senate committee is scheduled to vote on its chamber's version of health care parity. Pasch said she believes Wisconsin could join states such as Minnesota and Vermont in enhancing mental health insurance coverage benefits by next year.

Online reporting by Tony Galli

