Meet four psychologists working to improve psychology practice in their states.

By Hannah Calkins

Sixteen state, territorial and provincial psychological associations (SPTAs) employ a Director of Professional Affairs, or a DPA. A DPA is a psychologist who serves as an advocate and informational resource about professional practice issues for the SPTA and its members. DPAs also work closely with APA Practice Directorate and Practice Organization staff on professional psychology advocacy at the national level. They help advance the dialogue on a wide range of important professional issues affecting practitioners and their patients, including: mental health parity; health care financing; billing and reimbursement; licensure; psychological testing; and prescriptive authority.

Though the responsibilities of the DPA vary from state to state, they share the same broad goal: to improve the professional lives of practicing psychologists. They do this through consultations with members, legislative advocacy, coalition-building and sharing information and strategies with each other.

We spoke with four DPAs from across the country to highlight their work and demonstrate their value for all practicing psychologists.

Paul C. Berman, PhD
Maryland Psychological Association (MPA)
DPA since 1993
Berman is a licensed psychologist in Baltimore County, Maryland. He runs a forensic psychology practice with his wife, Katie Killeen, PhD, as well as the Towson Addiction Center.

In addition to this work, he spends about 12 hours a week carrying out his responsibilities as DPA, but that number can be as high as 20 or 30 hours a week during Maryland’s legislative session, which runs from January through April.

In Maryland, the DPA has a different title – Professional Affairs Officer – but it’s essentially the same position, Berman says. He has held the post for almost 25 years.

When people ask what this work entails, he tells them that he is “a liaison between psychology and the outside world.”

In practical terms, that means that he meets and negotiates with insurers, legislators and other mental health professionals to advocate for psychologists, shape policies and form multidisciplinary coalitions.

“It’s probably the most enjoyable part of what I do as a psychologist: reaching out to people in different worlds and making contact with people across associations and professions,” he says.

Berman is also very involved in MPA’s legislative activities, and spends some of his time consulting with MPA members and helping them solve problems in their practice – mostly related to insurance.

“My view of insurance and managed care companies has really changed during my time in this position,” he says. “They aren’t trying to deny mental health benefits; they’re trying to ensure that people have these benefits within reasonable budgetary frameworks. Our perspectives are just different.”

Charles Cooper, PhD
North Carolina Psychological Association (NCPA)
DPA since the late 1980s
Cooper describes a “marvelous synergy” between his work as a DPA and his broader professional life, where he is the executive director of a multidisciplinary practice in Chapel Hill and Raleigh.

“As DPA, I get to understand what’s happening in practice settings all over North Carolina, and I’m wired in with my DPA colleagues around the country,” he says. “Conversely, I do a better job as DPA because I direct a practice and am a clinician myself.”

Because the executive director of NCPA, Sally Cameron, is a registered lobbyist (and “a
phenomenon!” according to Cooper), Cooper leaves legislative activities to her and focuses on other areas.

“My job has been to work on insurance issues, and a lot of that has to do with advocating with decision-makers,” he says. He also either chairs or attends several regular committee meetings as DPA, such as the Long-Range Planning Task Force, which aims to help psychologists prepare for the future of the profession, and the Division of Independent Psychology Practice, which he compares to the Practice Organization.

“My major goal right now is to help North Carolina psychologists shift from a fee-for-service world into a pay-for-performance world, and to increase the integration of behavioral health into general health,” he says.

Cooper says the highlight of his year as DPA is the annual Practice Leadership Conference, where all the DPAs from across the country meet to exchange news and ideas. “It’s a rich, meaningful bond that we share,” he says.

Nanci C. Klein, PhD
Utah Psychological Association (UPA) DPA since 1996

Klein was drawn to the DPA role in 1996 for some of the same reasons she was drawn to psychology as an undergraduate during the Vietnam War.

She started out studying journalism, but found it challenging to remain objective. “Staying disengaged to fulfill the role of a journalist didn’t resonate with me. So I switched to psychology,” she says. “I always had a strong interest in advocacy and policy – how we define things in order to uplift people’s lives. And that’s what drew me to the DPA position, too.”

In Utah, the DPA is deeply involved with the association’s legislative activities. Klein represents UPA – and often represents the profession – in meetings, negotiations and hearings with the people who effect policy.

“Relationships are at the core of any kind of policy and regulatory discussion, and the DPA is at the center of those relationships in Utah,” she says.

Klein says that she spends about one day a week doing her DPA work. She also has a private practice in Salt Lake City and serves as a regional consultant for the Practice Organization’s Government Relations department.

“I see patients, and then I deal with the issues that affect them on a state level in terms of optimizing services for people who are often underserved. And that work fits into the larger scope of the federal work I do,” she says. “It all feels very organic, interconnected and mutually informative.”

Elizabeth Winkelman, JD, PhD
California Psychological Association (CPA) DPA since January 2016

Although Winkelman has been in the DPA role for a comparatively short time, she has a uniquely valuable background to draw from. She is a psychologist who has trained and worked in a variety of clinical settings, and she also has a legal background – which means that she not only understands the needs of practitioners, but she is also equipped with the skills to analyze the ways laws and regulations impact them.

Compounding that experience is her work in the APA and Practice Organization from 2005 to 2013.

“I worked on many of the same issues in the Practice Organization’s “Legal and Regulatory Affairs Department as I do in my current role as DPA,” she says. “There is a lot of overlap in the key issues that affect psychologists on the state and national level, so collaboration between the DPAs and the Practice Organization staff can be extremely useful.”

Now, Winkelman works closely with CPA’s leadership to promote psychologists’ interests in the legislature, at psychology board meetings and at meetings with regulators, she says. She also provides individual consultations to members on issues such as HIPAA compliance, insurance and billing and telehealth.

“Psychologists do a tremendous amount of important and challenging work to benefit their clients and society. I strive to make it easier for them to do that work,” she says.

Winkelman’s goals include continuing to work with insurance company administrators and regulators to improve policies and procedures that affect psychologists and their clients; disseminating CPA’s End of Life Option Act guidance document, which is intended for psychologists providing services under California’s aid-in-dying law (available at www.cpapsych.org/endoflifeoptionact); and expanding the practice tools and information available to members on the CPA website.