



UNIVERSITY OF  
SOUTH FLORIDA  
COLLEGE OF BEHAVIORAL  
& COMMUNITY SCIENCES

## Department of Rehabilitation & Mental Health Counseling



### Integrated Care Advocates Lobby Federal Legislators for Additional Funding to Train Behavioral Health Professionals

Dr. Rick Weinberg (Department of Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling) and a team of advocates recently returned from Capitol Hill where they visited the offices of Florida Senators, Bill Nelson and Marco Rubio as well as a number of Florida U.S. Representatives including Bill Young (District 10-Pinellas) and Cathy Castor (District 11-Tampa/St Petersburg).

The purpose of the trip was to promote more training of mental health graduate students placed and funded within Federally Qualified Health Care Centers (FQHC). FQHCs are community-based organizations that provide integrated primary and preventative traditional health, as well as mental health/substance abuse services to persons of all ages, regardless of their ability to pay. The main purpose of the FQHC Program is to enhance the provision of primary care services in underserved urban and rural communities. According to Weinberg, depending on the research you read, up to 70 percent of the patients presenting to health centers have a behavioral health component to their symptoms such as depression, anxiety, adjustment and substance abuse. It has also been determined that the impact of psychosocial factors on the body is even greater for people in poverty and other underserved populations. Weinberg also states that in spite of this research and our understanding of how important behavioral health is to an individual's overall health, not enough primary care providers have behavioral health treatment options available for their patients. Placing and funding mental health graduate students within the FQHC will not only provide vital training to future behavioral healthcare professional, but will also assist the FQHC deliver clinically effective and cost effective services to their clients.

Dr. Weinberg certainly has experience in this field. Between 2002 – 2004, he was the Principal Investigator on a grant that placed 4 interns a year in a variety of placements throughout the Tampa area, including Richard W. Puddy, PhD, MPH, currently a Branch Chief at the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, GA.

As far as the journey to Washington D.C. goes, Weinberg said that the meetings went well with each legislator promising support of the program. If the [Health Resources and Services Administration's Budget](#) (p 143), which contains the required funding through the Graduate Psychology Education Programs and The Mental and Behavioral Health Education and Training Grant Program passes, there will be Requests for Proposals (RFP) next year that will provide competitive opportunities for researchers like Dr. Weinberg to continue to advance the field of integrated health care.



Dr Rick Weinberg (left) and other members of the advocacy team meet with US Representative Cathy Castor (second from left).