

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
4TH DISTRICT, NEW JERSEY

CONSTITUENT SERVICE CENTERS:

1540 Kuser Road, Suite A9
Hamilton, NJ 08619-3828
(609) 585-7878
TTY (609) 585-3650

108 Lacey Road, Suite 38A
Whiting, NJ 08759-1331
(732) 350-2300

2373 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3004
(202) 225-3765



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEES:

VETERANS' AFFAIRS
CHAIRMAN

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
VICE CHAIRMAN

**COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE**
CHAIRMAN

July 23, 2004

Kay Coles James
Director
Office of Personnel Management
1900 E Street NW
Washington, DC 20414-1000

Dear Director James:

We are writing to inquire about what benefits, if any, are currently made available through the Federal Employees Health Insurance Plans (FEHBP) with regard to therapies and treatments for people with autism or an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Through our roles as Co-Founders and Co-Chairmen of the Congressional Coalition for Autism Research and Education (CARE), we were contacted recently by a group of federal employees from Northern Virginia expressing their concerns about the lack of services for autistic persons covered by FEHBP policies. The specific service cited by the family members is Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) – intensive therapy that works to reinforce positive behaviors and reduce negative actions in persons with autism or ASD.

As you may know, the number of Americans being diagnosed with autism and ASD (which includes Asperger's Syndrome, Rett's Syndrome, and Pervasive Development Disorder Not Otherwise Specified) continues to increase at a steady and alarming rate. Thankfully, research indicates that early diagnosis and intervention with appropriate services, such as ABA, can result in significant improvements in a person's ability to express themselves and to function effectively in life. Such treatments tend to be very expensive, especially if they are not covered by insurance plans, as they must be administered frequently and in one-to-one or small group settings to achieve optimum results.

The only reference to autism found in the FEHBP handbook simply states that a child with autism could be eligible for continued coverage of benefits. A preliminary review of plans available through FEHBP found that some policies do offer coverage for certain autism services, but there does not appear to be any consistency in terms of both coverage and cost to beneficiaries.

As Co-Chairmen of the Autism Caucus, which includes more than 190 Representatives and Senators, we would like a detailed response from OPM describing what specific services are available through FEHBP policies to help treat beneficiaries with autism or an ASD. We would


Director James
July 23, 2004
Page 2

also like to request that the relevant personnel at OPM consider possible ways in which access to services like ABA could be expanded through the FEHBP.

With both public and private sector funding sources continuing to expend tens of billions of dollars annually to care for people with autism and ASD, expanding access to critical intervention services could go a long way toward lowering future costs.

We thank you in advance for your time reviewing this important issue and we look forward to a prompt reply. If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact us, or Nick Manetto with Rep. Smith at 202-225-3765 or Mike Mullen with Rep. Doyle at 202-225-2135.

Sincerely,



CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Member of Congress



MIKE DOYLE
Member of Congress