

Mission: Nebraska Psychiatric Society exists to advance the profession of psychiatry, serve the needs of our members and provide support for psychiatric services across Nebraska.

Vision: To become a trusted voice and resource for psychiatric services in Nebraska.

A Message from the President:

Greetings fellow NPS members!

It is with great excitement that I write my first presidential column. I am honored that you have elected me to represent the psychiatrists of Nebraska and look forward to the amazing things we will do together to advance our profession in the coming year. When planning what to write about in this first newsletter article, I wanted to reveal the theme of my presidency and to also highlight the ways in which NPS has already successfully embodied this theme. The theme of my presidency is the "Value of Engagement."

In the last several months alone, NPS hosted a membership meeting at Spielbound Board Game Cafe, participated in the joint MOMS/ACP/ AAP/NPS Policymaker Meet and Greet with local legislators and candidates, held a national educational webinar on peripartum depression management featuring NPS member Dr. Allie Burt, partook in an Area IV district branch listening session with new APA CEO Dr. Marketa Wills, attended the APA State Advocacy Conference in Washington, DC, and nominated NPS member Dr. Kim Clawson for a prestigious forensic psychiatry judicial training program that she was accepted to and subsequently represented NPS on the national stage.

The value of engagement in NPS could not be more evident. NPS goes to work with you and for you. The professional development of NPS members is critically important to ensure a thriving psychiatry community in all practice settings. NPS values you, our members, and we want to

engage with you this year more than ever.

There are many ways to engage with NPS and with your fellow Alëna Balasanova, MD psychiatrist



community. I encourage NPS members to please reach out if you have interest in specific types of opportunities through the APA or locally. In particular, we are eager to welcome to NPS the two new cohorts of psychiatry residents from Creighton and UNMC, about whom you will read in the following pages. Also in this issue you will find a policy update from legislative chair Dr. Harmit Singh. We are also continuing the trend of including a delightfully fun crossword puzzle on the last page, created by none other than our newsletter editor, the very talented Dr. Josh Robak!

I hope you enjoy the contents of this newsletter and look forward to seeing you at an upcoming NPS event. Not to spoil the surprise, but there's something fun in store for our winter membership meeting so look out for more details in this newsletter!

Sincerely yours, Alëna A. Balasanova, MD, FAPA President, Nebraska Psychiatric Society



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Please consider donating to the **APA Political Action Committee--if** every member of the APA donated \$50, APA would have the most powerful professional lobby in Washington. Go here https://www.psychiatry.org/ <u>psychiatrists/advocacy/apapac_to join.</u>

Legislative Update

On election night, Nebraska voters came out in substantial numbers with the 2nd highest votes cast in the state's history. Decisive choices were made on a variety of important ballot measures from reproductive rights and cannabis legalization to workplace protections. These results will significantly impact our patients' mental health needs.

Abortion and Reproductive Rights

Nebraskans voted on two opposing abortion measures on this election's ballot. In 2023, Nebraska enacted LB574, restricting abortion access to within 12 weeks, except in cases of rape, incest, or when the life of the pregnant person is at risk. This significant reduction from a 20-week limit sparked considerable public debate. Initiative 439 was on the ballot this November aiming to protect abortion access until fetal viability. This initiative proposed a constitutional amendment to allow abortion up until fetal viability (around 24 weeks). This was narrowly rejected, with 51.0% of voters opposing the measure. On the other hand. Nebraskans voted in favor of the Initiative 434 that limits abortion after 12 weeks with 55.0% in favor. The restriction includes exceptions only for cases of rape, incest, or to protect the life of the pregnant person. This result solidifies Nebraska's current abortion limitations, preventing further expansion of abortion rights in Nebraska.

Medical Cannabis Legalization

Nebraska voters approved two medical cannabis initiatives in November. with Initiative Measures 437 and 438 receiving 71.0% and 67.3% in favor, respectively. Measure 437 allows qualified patients to possess up to five ounces of cannabis with a healthcare provider's recommendation and exempts patients and caregivers from penalties for its use. Measure 438 establishes a state commission to regulate medical cannabis production and distribution. However, the final legalization of medical cannabis is uncertain due to legal challenges questioning the validity of petition signatures used to place the initiatives on the ballot. The court's decision will determine whether Nebraska

moves forward with medical cannabis legalization. If the court upholds the measures, Nebraska will join a growing number of states that allow medical cannabis, addressing healthcare access for qualifying patients. However, if the court invalidates the measures, advocates will face new barriers in their efforts to establish medical cannabis laws in the state.

Paid Sick Leave

Nebraska voters approved the paid sick leave ballot initiative, requiring employers to provide a set number of paid sick days based on company size. This outcome signals growing support for labor rights in the state and aligns Nebraska with a broader national trend toward enhanced workplace protections.

In 2025, Nebraska's upcoming legislative agenda may include prominent issues such as mental health services expansion and a push for prescriptive authority (RxP) for psychologists. The results of the November 2024 ballot initiative will also play a role in shaping the state's future legislative focus.

Mental Health Services Expansion

Nebraska legislators are focusing on increasing access to mental health services, particularly for underserved areas. LB276 is a leading bill to establish Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) across the state. These clinics provide integrated mental health and substance use disorder services, aiming to reduce emergency interventions and ensure consistent care for individuals in need. The bill proposes establishing clinics in cities like Omaha and Kearney, and to enhance school-based mental health resources, addressing the rise in youth mental health issues through early intervention.

Prescriptive Authority (RxP) for Psychologists

Nebraska's movement toward prescriptive authority (RxP) for psychologists has gained significant traction as part of a broader national push to expand mental health services, especially in underserved areas. The Nebraska Psychological Association (NPA) has been advocating for RxP to address the shortage of psychiatric care providers. If approved, this would allow



Harmit Singh, MD

qualified psychologists to prescribe medications for mental health conditions following advanced training in clinical psychopharmacology. This would follow similar laws in states like New Mexico, Louisiana, Iowa, and Colorado. Nebraska's initiative is currently undergoing review by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (NDHHS), which is required before the issue can advance to legislative consideration. This process often takes several months, meaning any resulting legislation could be introduced in an upcoming session. We will be closely watching for any such bills in the upcoming session.

Dr. Harmit Singh and Dr. Alëna Balasanova represented Nebraska Psychiatric Society at the APA State Advocacy Conference in Washington D.C. in September 2024 where they discussed our district branches' priorities and challenges and worked on strategies to effectively advocate for our stated mental health needs.

We encourage you to reach out to your local representative by email, phone call, or letter, and let them know your opinion on legislation. The link to find your senator is here: https://nebraskalegislature.gov

Your voice as a constituent matters. If you are interested in testifying next year during a committee hearing, the APA has resources to help, and we also have NPS members that have testified in the past who will gladly guide you through the process (it's painless). Feel free to contact any Executive Committee member if you want assistance with legislative issues.

Harmit Singh, MD Legislative Representative

Dr. Melissa O'Dell and Dr. Matthew Kelly represented the Nebraska Psychiatry Society on November 1-3 at the fall meeting of the APA Assembly in Chantilly, Virginia. Dr. Kelly was standing in for Assembly Representative, Dr. Martin Wetzel. "OK, but what actually is the APA Assembly?" one might reasonably ask. The Assembly is a deliberative body composed of representatives elected from the APA district branches and those that represent organizations affiliated with the APA, which recommends action to the APA Board of Trustees. Put simply, the Assembly has been the voice of the members of the APA since it was established in 1953. The Area Councils provide a regional organizational structure as the interface between the Assembly and the District Branches. The objectives of the District Branch are to foster science and enhance the progress of psychiatry, to promote the maintenance of high professional and administrative standards, and to assist the APA in promoting its aims and objectives. Nebraska, along with Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin, comprise Area 4 of the Assembly.

One of the most enjoyable parts of Assembly meetings is the opportunity to hear APA leaders speak about their vision for our organization. Sitting in the cavernous banquet hall among fellow Area 4 Assembly Members, Dr. O'Dell was struck by the culture of diversity of leadership that the APA membership has cultivated. The Assembly was called to order by the APA Speaker, Dr. Steven Starks, a young black man. The Speakerelect report was given by Dr. A. Evan Eyler, a trans man. We heard new CEO and Medical Director, Dr. Marketa Wills, speak about a black female psychiatrist mentor who helped her discover an unexpected love of psychiatry when she

was a medical student with her sights firmly set on a non-clinical career path as a hospital administrator. Dr. Wills spoke to an electrified audience of Assembly members about cultivating a culture in our organization of frankness, openness, and transparency; she talked about developing a strategic plan for leading the organization while also voicing her view that "culture eats strategy for breakfast." To remain solvent into the future, the APA will be working on the diversification of revenue streams, as traditional money makers such as the annual meeting are becoming less and less reliable sources of revenue.

This was a perfect segue to the report of the APA treasurer, Dr. Steve Koh, who shared the details of the organization's financial situation. For the past decade or so, our reserve spending policy allowed investment returns to be treated as revenue on the annual budget, which encouraged some risky financial habits including short term budgeting based on investment returns and left the organization vulnerable to market swings, hampering long-term strategizing and asset protection. Moving forward, investment returns will be automatically reinvested and not considered revenue for budgeting purposes. This belt-tightening measure is an effort to ensure the organization's stability over the next 100 years in an increasingly uncertain world.

Just prior to the Assembly meeting, the Assembly voted to approve a new APA Practice Guideline for the Prevention and Treatment of Delirium. Please reach out to Dr. O'Dell directly (melissa.odell@ unmc.edu) if you would like to hear more about the action papers and position statements deliberated on by the Assembly during the fall meeting.

Various groups of Assembly members met throughout the weekend. Dr. O'Dell serves as Area 4's representative to the Public and Community Psychiatry Committee, and she also attended a meeting of the women's caucus. In



Melissa O'Dell MD

this meeting, there was frank discussion about the avenues in which women concerned about reproductive health rights should best direct their advocacy efforts to effect positive change on issues that matter most to us. We discussed the challenges inherent in investing so much of our time, energy, and talents in organizations that, in their advocacy efforts, may prioritize keeping the non-partisan peace in situations that we feel instead call for bold, courageous action. In response, one women's caucus member pointed out that grassroots advocacy efforts within APA have led to the prioritization of women's health issues in the organization and translated into APA lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill. If you feel so inspired, please consider donating even a small amount to the APAPAC, which supports advocacy efforts on behalf of our profession and our patients. The effectiveness of a political action committee is tied to the degree to which the PAC can be said to truly represent the membership of the organization, so donating even a token amount is helpful! In these challenging times, the key to warding off hopelessness and nihilism is to make your voice heard on the issues that matter most to you and have the greatest impact on the well-being of people in your community. Please make your voice heard in whatever way and at whatever level (national, state, county, neighborhood) that you have the opportunity.

Melissa O'Dell, MD Area 4 Representative

Drs. Shashi and Subhash Bhatia Inducted Into Aksarben Foundation Court of Honor

Described as the "Pillars of the Psychiatric Community" in Omaha, Dr. Shashi Bhatia and Dr. Subhash Bhatia were chosen as 2024 inductees into the Aksarben Foundation Court of Honor for their contributions to education and professions.

Since 1988, this annual award has been given to community members who have

excelled in at least one of the following categories: agriculture, arts, business and industry, community service, education, philanthropy, professions, public service, sports or youth.

Welcome 2023-2024 Creighton Psychiatry Residents



Yazan Al-Khalila, MD is a PGY-1 psychiatry resident at Creighton University in Omaha, NE. He is from Jordan and went to Hashemite University for medical school. He is particularly interested in meaning cultivation and addiction psychiatry.



Orrin Chambers, DO is a PGY-1 at Creighton University. He is originally from Colorado Springs, CO and completed his Bachelor of Science degree in Molecular Biology at Brigham Young University. He earned his medical degree at Rocky Vista

University where he completed a Pre-Doctoral Fellowship Program in Medical Simulation Education. He and his family have enjoyed exploring all the food and family activities Omaha has to offer.



Ayse Kubra Coskun, MD is a rural track psychiatry PGY-1 at Creighton University. She received her medical training at Istanbul University Medical School in Turkey. She completed her postdoctoral fellowship in Gene Therapy and Molecular Virology at

Baylor College of Medicine in Texas. She also served as a research faculty at Yale Medical School for 15 years before moving to Omaha for her residency.



Caitlin Leconte, MD is a PGY-1 at Creighton University Psychiatry Residency. She completed medical school at the University of Kansas School of Medicine and worked for 1.5 years as a moderator for women's sexual assault support groups. She is interested

in all areas of psychiatry but has specific interests in adult psychiatry, rural outreach, and medical education.



Nishi Modi, MBBS is a PGY-1 psychiatry resident at Creighton University in Omaha. Originally from Gujarat, India, she earned her medical degree from Government Medical College, Surat. She is deeply committed to making mental health care more accessible and

is passionate about volunteering. She is particularly interested in pursuing a specialization in child and adolescent psychiatry, where she hopes to make a lasting impact on the well-being of young individuals and their families.



Mohan Palakollu, MD is a PGY-1 psychiatry resident at Creighton University. He completed both his undergraduate studies and medical school at the University of Missouri in Kansas City. He is enjoying exploring the city of Omaha and is looking forward to his psychiatric training.

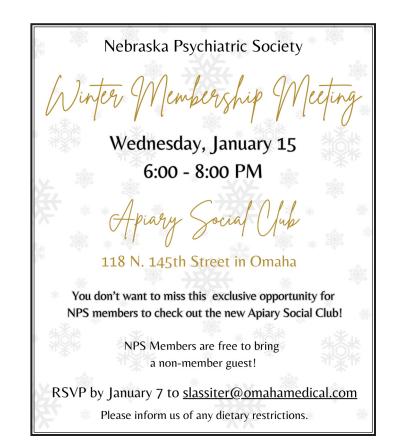


Ahmed Sakr, MD is a PGY-1 psychiatry resident at Creighton University and completed medical school at Tanta University in Egypt. He later worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Minnesota's Interventional Psychiatry Lab focusing on treatment-resistant

depression. This is his third year living in the Midwest and he has grown to love the region, especially Omaha.



Geena Sutherland, MD is a PGY-1 psychiatry resident at Creighton University. She is originally from Minneapolis, Minnesota and attended medical school at St. George's University. Since moving to Omaha, the things she has loved the most are the nice people and the great food scene!



Welcome 2023-2024 UNMC Psychiatry Residents



Brittany Bamberg Arend, MD is a PGY-1 at the University of Nebraska Medicine Psychiatry Residency. She grew up in the rural town of Corsica, SD along with her three sisters. She completed her bachelor's degree in medical biology and medical school training at the University of South Dakota San-

ford School of Medicine. Brittany moved to Omaha with her husband for residency and they enjoy exploring the city. They are both avid Huskers fans and love attending sporting events whenever possible. She has been warmly welcomed into the UNMC psychiatry residency family and enjoys spending time with her fellow residents.



Jacob Dines, DO is a PGY-1 psychiatry resident at the University of Nebraska Medicine who completed medical school at LECOM - Bradenton. He served as a flight surgeon in the Navy for three years at an F18 Squadron and served as the medical director for the

Search and Rescue team at his squadron during his service. He has a strong interest in outpatient psychiatry, particularly in working with adult populations experiencing trauma and stress-related disorders, addiction, and utilizing mindfulnessbased cognitive therapies. He is also focused on interventional psychiatry modalities such as TMS, as well as advancing and staying current with the research in psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy, including MDMA and ketamine therapies. Additionally, he holds a certification in psychedelic-assisted psychotherapies from the California Institute of Integral Studies Center for Psychedelic Therapies and Research.



Brett Jesse, MD is a psychiatry PGY-1 at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. He completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in Biology and Anthropology at St. Louis University followed by medical training at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. He is interested in adolescent and young adult mental health,

psychodynamic psychotherapy, and interventional psychiatry.



Tony Le, MD was raised in Lincoln, NE and completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Nebraska -Lincoln. He moved to Omaha to attend medical school at UNMC and has stayed to complete residency at UNMC. His most loved food is chicken tenders and most hated food is mac and cheese. He is

interested in all areas of psychiatry but has specific interests in child and adolescent and consultation-liaison.



Jacob Moore, MD is a PGY-1 at the University of Nebraska Medical Center Psychiatry Residency. He completed medical school at UNMC where he served on the board of the Psychiatry Interest Group for a year, as well as completed multiple research projects in the field of psychiatry. He is especially

interested in child and adolescent psychiatry and medical education.

A Tribute to Dr. Meghan Sheehan



It is with great sadness that we share the tragic and unexpected loss of our colleague and fellow psychiatrist, Dr. Meghan Sheehan, on September 2, 2024. The Omaha psychiatric community feels the profound loss of such a wonderful clinician and teacher. As a Consultation-Liaison fellowship-trained psychiatrist, she specialized in perinatal psychiatry, psycho-oncology, transplant psychiatry, and medical ethics. She leaves behind a legacy of advocating for women's mental health and reproductive rights, and efforts to improve gender, LGBTQ+, and racial equality in psychiatric care. Dr. Sheehan considered herself a life-long learner and had a tremendous gift in teaching which she generously shared with many medical students, physician assistants, and resident physicians. Even more than her love of being a psychiatrist, she loved being a mom and wife to her two young daughters and husband. She continually sought to instill hope in

all of her patients, showing compassion for the weary and broken-hearted. This became all the more evident in her last selfless gift of organ donation. May we carry on Dr. Sheehan's spirit of advocacy and equality for everyone as we seek to improve access and quality of psychiatric care in our city. On September 30th, United Way of the Midlands Women United and Film Streams Dundee hosted a viewing of the documentary, "The Mind Inside," the first in a three-part series from I Love Public Schools, in recognition of Suicide Prevention Month. Directed by Sally Nellson, it is a moving film about mental health in the Millard Public Schools. It follows a few students from Millard North Middle School and shines a light on their personal challenges with mental health and the challenges they face outside of school which impact their ability to excel (or even engage) academically. It features Eric Depue who serves as a social worker at Millard North Middle School. Mr. Depue gives an honest and moving account of his personal interactions with the students and his compassionate devotion to their academic and personal success. It highlights the school's

deep commitment to acknowledging how mental health affects academics. The gracious and courageous students who allow their stories to be told give a powerful testimony to the need for more people like Mr. Depue. One of the students highlighted in the film made a surprise appearance and joined the panel for a discussion after the viewing. The theater was full and the discussion was lively. This film had a significant impact on me and reminded me how critical our services are as mental health care providers and advocates. I encourage everyone to view the entire Mind Inside Series at the I Love Public Schools YouTube channel.

United Way of the Midlands serves the Omaha-Council Bluffs metro by bridging the business and not-for-profit sectors to create a Circle of Support that helps our neighbors overcome difficult challenges and start building a better future. And through Women United's focus on mental health in our community – UWM, in partnership with



Steve Salzbrenner, MD

Region 6, is increasing awareness of and access to free Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training – while also supporting a campaign to reduce the stigma in asking for help with mental health challenges. You can learn more about MHFA at: UnitedWayMidlands.org/MHFA.

Steve Salzbrenner, MD Past President

Legislative Meet & Greet

NPS members joined local legislators on August 23, 2024 at the Physician and Policymaker Meet and Greet to advocate for issues affecting mental health care in Nebraska.





ANNOUNCEMENT:

We want everyone to be informed of exciting updates from NPS! Please ensure senders from "omahamedical.com" are being sent to your inbox, rather than spam. The communications promise to be useful, not overwhelming.

Nebraska's Medical Cannabis Legalization: Public Health, Safety, and Economic Impacts

In a landmark decision, Nebraska voters approved two initiatives to legalize medical cannabis: Initiative Measure 437, which passed with 71.0% support, and Initiative Measure 438, approved by 67.3%. These measures allow individuals with qualifying medical conditions to use cannabis under a healthcare provider's recommendation and establish the Nebraska Medical Cannabis Commission to regulate cannabis distribution and sales. Even though it received support in the ballot, there are legal challenges ahead before it is implemented. As Nebraska joins a growing list of states embracing cannabis as a potential therapeutic option, there are significant public health, safety, and economic implications to consider.

Public Health Considerations Benefits:

- Mental Health Support: Some studies suggest that cannabis may offer an alternative treatment to conventional pharmaceuticals, particularly for those who have not responded to other therapies in managing symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, and autism spectrum disorder.

- Pain Management and Opioid Reduction: Cannabis has proven effective in treating chronic pain, which could offer an alternative to opioids. A 2017 study found that opioid-related hospitalizations declined by 23% in 27 states following medical cannabis legalization. This provides a promising alternative for Nebraskans seeking pain relief without the risks associated with opioid use.

Concerns:

- Mental Health Risks: Availability of highpotency THC products with concentrations of THC exceeding 15%, common in concentrates like wax and oils that can reach up to 90%, have been associated with heightened mental health risks, especially among young users. A systematic review by the Colorado Department of Public Health highlighted emerging trends of psychosis and anxiety tied to high-THC use. These findings spurred Colorado legislators to recommend stricter controls, such as THC caps in medical cannabis and broader public education efforts.

- Youth Cannabis Use: According to an annual report tracking the impact of

cannabis legalization in Colorado, there has been a 20% increase in cannabis use among young adults in Colorado since recreational legalization.

- Cannabis Use Disorder: Data from the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) suggests that 22-30% of cannabis users develop cannabis use disorder (CUD), which can negatively impact employment and quality of life. According to the 2023 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), 6.8% of the US population aged 12 and older met criteria for a cannabis use disorder in the past year. Frequent cannabis use can impair cognitive functions, such as memory and attention.

Legal and Public Safety Considerations Benefits:

- Reduction in Cannabis-Related Arrests: Legalizing medical cannabis could lead to a reduction in cannabis-related arrests, and thus, allow for law enforcement resources to focus on other public safety priorities.

Concerns:

- Impaired Driving: From 2013 to 2018, Colorado experienced a 140% increase in traffic fatalities with cannabinoid-positive drivers. Unlike alcohol, THC does not have a clear correlation with impairment, making it difficult for law enforcement to set consistent standards for safe driving.

- Illegal Market: Despite legalization, Colorado continues to face challenges in curbing illegal cannabis sales.

Economic Considerations Benefits:

- Revenue Generation: Legalized cannabis has generated significant tax revenue in Colorado, exceeding \$2.5 billion since its legalization. This revenue has been allocated to education, healthcare, and infrastructure. Nebraska could see similar financial benefits, which could support vital services such as mental health programs, opioid prevention initiatives, or crime prevention.

- Job Creation: Colorado's cannabis industry created over 41,000 jobs by 2020, spanning cultivation, retail, and ancillary services. If Nebraska can replicate this success, legalizing medical cannabis could create job opportunities in both urban and rural areas. The state's agricultural sector could also benefit from cannabis cultivation, contributing to local economies.

Concerns:

-Absenteeism and Productivity: A 2024 cross-sectional study of 46,499 adults shows that presence of past-month cannabis use, greater frequency of use, and presence of cannabis use disorder is associated with increased incidence of both missing and skipping work. Greater severity of cannabis use disorder (mild, moderate, severe) showed a stepwise increase in the incidence of skipping work.

Recommendations for Nebraska

To mitigate the risks associated with medical cannabis, Nebraska can implement a responsible framework:

1. Rigorous Regulation: The state must establish strict regulations for cannabis cultivation, distribution, and sale to prevent illegal market operations and ensure product safety. Limiting THC levels in the products available might help address some of its risks and inform a more balanced approach to legalization.

2. Public Health Education: A robust public health campaign focusing on the safe use of cannabis, its potential mental health effects, and impaired driving risks is crucial. Education programs targeting young people can help mitigate the risk of youth misuse.

3. Monitoring and Research: Ongoing research into the public health impacts of cannabis use including tracking hospital visits and substance use disorder cases will help inform future policies and regulations.

4. Workplace Support Programs: Given the potential impact of cannabis use on productivity, Nebraska could implement workplace support programs to assist employees struggling with cannabis use disorder and help employers address workrelated issues linked to cannabis use.

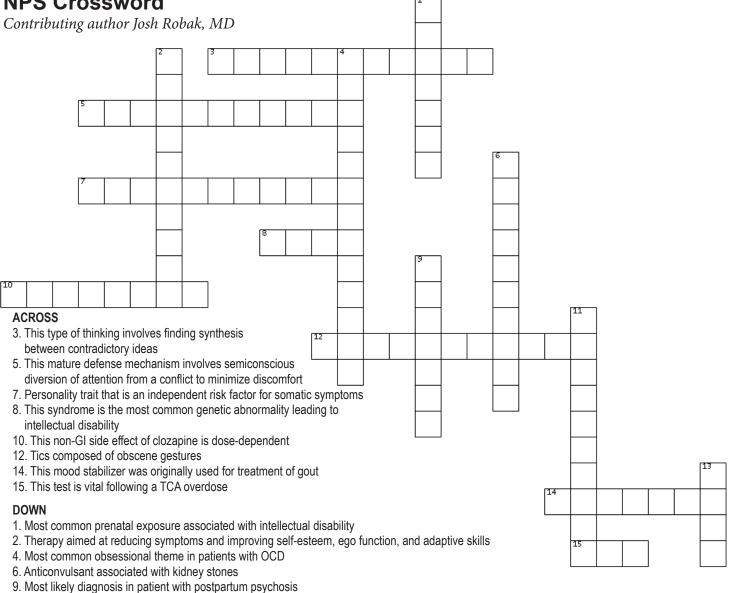
While the legalization of medical cannabis in Nebraska presents promising opportunities, it also brings significant challenges. By learning from the experiences of states like Colorado, Nebraska can create a balanced framework that maximizes benefits while minimizing potential harms.

Harmit Singh, MD Legislative Representative

NPS Crossword

11. The psychoactive portion of Cobenfy

13. This cognitive test is less sensitive for mild cognitive impairment





Omaha, NE 68114