



## OFFICE OF THE HEALTHCARE ADVOCATE

# *We're In Your Corner*

*A Message from your Healthcare Advocate*



### **Welcome!**

Connecticut is about to come full circle on the covid pandemic with Governor Lamont essentially ending the remaining business restrictions on May 19th. This in part is because we're leading the nation in vaccination rates through a multi-layered approach to reach and convince the public about the necessity of being vaccinated. The state however needs to continue working to make sure the vaccine gets to the underserved communities.

Throughout this extraordinary time, among the many who have taken care of our loved ones, helped them heal and stood with our families in grief and hope are our state's nurses. Their compassionate care and selfless service throughout the pandemic, when we knew so little, they risked so much.

Who better then, to administer the lifesaving vaccines than those in the nursing profession? It's an honor to salute these medical professionals and to be thankful for

They helped us get through it – and we have some of those nurses on our staff here at OHA. They bring the same compassion and understanding to your many insurance questions and coverage problems. You can count on them too.

We're all in your corner.

Ted.

**Ted Doolittle**

*Healthcare Advocate, State of Connecticut*



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## RECENT NEWS

### Celebrating Nurses

OHA's ability to fight for you when it comes to medical claims and to understand what you and your family are experiencing comes from deep expertise and empathy from being on the front lines of medical care. We celebrate our nursing staff along with all those healthcare heroes.

**Valerie Wyzkowski**, RN, MS, CLNC is the Healthcare Advocate Program Manager for OHA since 2012. Valerie is responsible for managing staff in the different technical



Connecticut residents, along with consumer information and support staff. Valerie also oversees specific areas covering case management, outreach, advocacy, educational webinars and training. She administers data reporting, tracking and reporting trends and patterns on numerous healthcare insurance plan issues consumers face. Valerie sits on many committees and collaborates with other state agencies and organizations to assist Connecticut residents.

For over 20 years Valerie has been working and advocating in the mental health and substance abuse field. Prior to coming to OHA, Valerie worked for nearly 17 years, at the Albert J. Solnit Center, a DCF residential treatment facility for teens with complex psychiatric needs. She started as a childcare worker in 1996 and left as a Head Nurse. During this time, Valerie worked with children/adolescents with mental health, substance abuse issues, their families and caregivers. These duties included treatment and discharge planning; medication management and education; healthcare wellness, staff training and advocating for the patients, families, caregivers on all levels.

Valerie enjoys her 7 children and 3 grandchildren along with her husband of 37 years.



**Annika Burney** graduated from Goodwin College, with an Associate Degree in Nursing. She has an extensive background working in a local hospital with a specialty in stroke patients. Annika also graduated from Eastern Connecticut State University (ECSU) where she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Work. Annika worked in various community organizations as a case manager with under-served communities and with those who have special needs. Annika also has over ten years of experience working in long term care facilities as a social worker.

In 2014, Annika joined the State of Connecticut Office of the Healthcare Advocate as a Nurse Consultant. There she works with individuals and families having difficulty accessing their health



**Caroline Butler** joined the Office of the Healthcare Advocate (OHA) in 2013 as a Nurse Consultant. She brings with her a diverse background in hospital-based nursing. She is a native of Connecticut and earned her bachelor's degree in Nursing in 2019 while working at OHA.

Caroline worked at Hartford Hospital for 23 years as a floor nurse in General Surgery, Outpatient Surgery, Maternity, and the Women's Health Clinic. Caroline has a strong clinical background working for medically complex individuals needing hospitalization. She particularly enjoyed working in the surgical and women's health departments and has specialized training in the care of at-high-risk mothers and their newborns babies.

Caroline brings hospital-based clinical expertise to OHA to educate consumers regarding matters of care decision-making and serves as an advocate with multiple managed care organizations. She participates on an Opioid Task Force and Connecticut Cancer Partnership committee.

Caroline enjoys spending time with her family, gardening and being outdoors. She also volunteers for her church and youth programs in her town. She has two teenage children.



**Jacqueline Murillo**, MSN has served as a nurse consultant at the Office of the Healthcare Advocate since 2013. She has been an RN since 1998, initially working for several years in long-term care facilities. During that time, she cared for the needs of the elderly to ensure that they received the best care possible.

Jacqueline returned to school and will be graduating with a Doctor in Nursing Practice from Quinnipiac University in May 2021. She loves being a nurse and is

In addition to her role as a nurse consultant, Jacqueline is active in various organizations and activities, including a member of Academy Health's thematic workgroup to explore how African American and Latinx patient's communities experience low-value care. As a Spanish speaker, Jacqueline interprets, translates, and advocate for patients to overcome language barriers.



**Jill Hall** joined the Office of the Healthcare Advocate (OHA) in November 2012 during Connecticut's rollout of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) Consumer Assistance Program (CAP). She is our senior nurse consultant and specializes in autism services, disability advocacy, mental health system reform initiatives and veteran matters.

Jill is a wartime service veteran and graduate of the University of Connecticut's Master's Entry into Nursing (MBeIN) program. She also holds a Bachelor's degree in Workforce Education and Development from Southern Illinois University. Originally from Kalamazoo Michigan, Jill now calls Connecticut home. She resides in Rocky Hill with her spouse and their adult son.



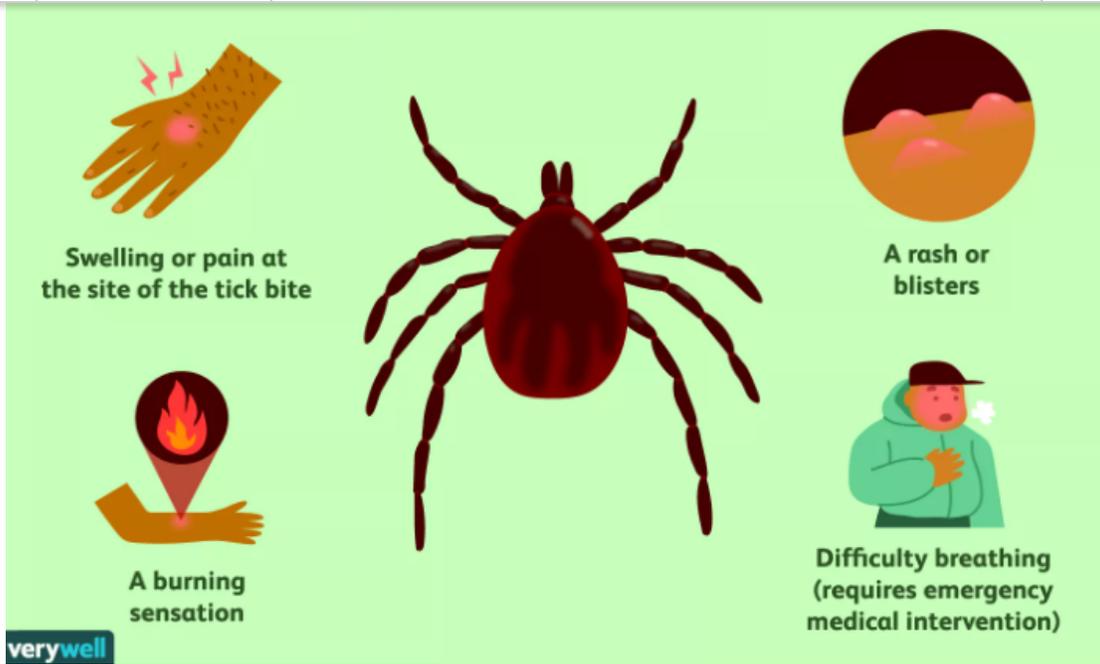


## **Mental Health and Addiction:** **Your Need To Know**

Mental health, addiction and behavioral health are tough subjects for families to internally discuss and even more awkward when it comes to filing a claim with your healthcare insurance company. It is critical however, that those who need treatment get that help without delay.

Under both federal and State of Connecticut law, insurance companies cannot assess a diminished benefit that is less than your medical and surgical benefits. It's called parity and they have to be the same. If your family is experiencing a difficult time in any of these areas, and you have insurance, there is hope. Talk to one of our experts to make sure you are getting the coverage your family needs to heal.





## Watch Out for Ticks and Claim Denials!

The Northeast is a hotspot for Lyme disease, and that risk is expected to grow this year. The ticks that cause Lyme disease — the deer tick — are year-round residents of New England, thanks to the growing population of white-tailed deer. Early data shows Lyme disease rates are already up 6% compared to averages, possibly because of people's increased time outdoors during the pandemic.

The tick season began in April and runs through October, essentially our warmer and more humid months. Forecasters are predicting a warmer season this year and more rain which is ideal for a growing tick population and possible exposure to tick borne germs and disease. Here's some important information:

[https://www.cdc.gov/ticks/pdfs/FS\\_TickBite.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/ticks/pdfs/FS_TickBite.pdf)

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## **OHA: We're in YOUR Corner**

The consumer contacted OHA for assistance with a denial of a tick-borne pathogen laboratory test. The consumer became ill after traveling and sought medical care. The provider ordered a Lyme virus test; however, the test came back negative for the pathogen. The member's symptoms continued for over a week after his initial office visit, despite the initial course of antibiotics. As a diagnostic tool, the member's treating physician had to rule out West Nile disease, a serious yet treatable disease, in order to determine the appropriate further treatment; therefore, he ordered another test. Coverage for the test was denied by the health plan as experimental and investigational – meaning that the insurance plan deemed the test to require more study in order to prove its safety and reliability for the diagnosis of this illness.

OHA sent a second level appeal to the health plan, arguing that the test was safe and reliable, and therefore medically necessary to evaluate the member for infection by the tick-borne pathogen. Moreover, time was of the essence for the member, since he was not showing signs of improvement with prior treatments. OHA requested that the health plan's decision be reversed, and the claim be reprocessed according to his plan with appropriate adjustments and customary cost-sharing.

exhausted.

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## Email Sign-Up

OHA has saved consumers tens of millions of dollars since the agency was launched - and we've become a trusted resource and consumer advocate on all matters of healthcare insurance here in Connecticut and on developments in Washington, D.C. that can affect us. We share these changes and information in many ways - social platforms like our page on [Facebook](#) and Twitter, press conferences and via this newsletter. If you know somebody who is not getting this newsletter on a regular basis - or is only getting it because it's shared with them - OHA invites one and all to join our exclusive email list. Sign up for the [newsletter](#) here.

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The OHA will help you during this crisis get you the assistance you need.

OHA Resources



Many other services are covered by the Department of Social Services (DSS).

Department of Social Services



Compare the cost of non-emergent healthcare treatments before you get the bill.

Healthscore CT

# Our New Website



We invite you to visit our new website!

It can be found here: <https://portal.ct.gov/oha>

Notice the new address. It's slightly different than the old one but no worries if you happen to forget, it will automatically redirect you to our new one. Read, enjoy, be informed and know your rights and responsibilities in the fast moving world of healthcare insurance. There are many helpful tips, links and great information you'll find useful.



## Our Mission

The mission of the Office of the Healthcare Advocate (OHA) is to assist consumers with healthcare issues through the establishment of effective outreach programs and the development of communications related to consumer rights and responsibilities as members of healthcare plans. OHA focuses on assisting consumers in making informed decisions when selecting a health plan; assisting consumers to resolve problems with their health insurance plans and tracking trends of issues/problems, which may require administrative or legislative intervention, or advocacy with industry, the public, or other stakeholders



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