

Testimony of Jeffrey B. Schnoor, President-Elect, Vermont Society of Health-System Pharmacists

Friday, January 20, 2016

Re: Pharmacists as Health Care Providers

Pharmacists have the most advanced education and training in medications and medication management than any other health care professional. At the Federal level, pharmacists are not recognized as health care providers. Vermont pharmacists have come together to campaign for “provider status” in Vermont. Vermont pharmacists believe we have the unique skills to improve patient care in the state of Vermont. Provider status will recognize pharmacists as leaders on the healthcare team. Oregon and Washington State have led the way in providing reimbursement for pharmacists as providers. I would like to see Vermont continue to lead this effort. Provider status for pharmacists will enhance patient safety, improve provider availability in medically underserved areas, and reduce costs of care.

In my role as a Medication Safety Officer, I review and investigate medical adverse events. As healthcare and medication management continues to get more and more complex, it has never been more evident that medication experts provided the time to focus on medication management and solve medication related problems are needed as providers on the health care team. Patients see pharmacists as a most trusted profession. When it comes to their medications, they need the opportunity to make appointments with a pharmacist. This need is most evident in transitions of care and high risk patients. Transitions in care, specifically admission and discharge to/from health care facilities are moments of patient vulnerability and patient safety concern. According to the Center’s for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 21.8% of United States population is using three or more prescription medications and 75.1% of physician office visits and 80.3% of emergency department visits involve drug therapy. Pharmacists are uniquely trained to handle the barrage of medication management needs that are admitting to Vermont’s healthcare facilities and seeking care in primary care offices.

Not only can pharmacists improve patient safety, but they can meet patient needs in Vermont’s medically underserved areas. According to Health Resources and Services Administration ([hrsa.gov](http://hrsa.gov)), the majority of Vermont’s cities/counties qualify as medically underserved areas. The Association of American Medical Colleges projects that by 2020, Americans will have 91,000 fewer physicians than necessary to meet patient needs. The Vermont Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) Network reports that 34% of primary care physicians are limiting or closed to accepting new patients. Pharmacists serving in provider roles can help meet patient needs in medically underserved areas and primary care provider shortages in Vermont.

Finally, efficient use of healthcare dollars is always of utmost concern. More than 1.5 million preventable medication-related adverse events occur in the United States each year. Furthermore, nearly \$290 billion is incurred annually in mostly avoidable costs to treat adverse events from inappropriate medication use. Medication non-adherence alone results in \$100 billion each year in

excess hospitalizations. Prevention of medication errors and education of medication adherence is what pharmacists are trained to do, more so than any other healthcare professional.

In summary, Vermont's health system needs to continue to lead the country in accountable care that is highly reliable. Placing pharmacist as providers and leaders on the healthcare team is essential to providing safe medication management that meets Vermont's medically underserved areas and primary care shortages while reducing healthcare costs.