



Testimony on S.53
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Senate Health and Welfare Committee
Wednesday, February 7, 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S.53 My name is Dr. Lorilee Schoenbeck. I have been practicing primary care as a naturopathic physician (ND) in Vermont for 22 years, in both conventional and integrative settings. I currently own and am medical director of a Blueprint certified Patient Centered Medical Home in South Burlington, Mountain View Natural Medicine. We serve a little over 3,000 active patients. I'm also Vice President of the Vermont Association of Naturopathic Physicians (VANP), and served on the Governor's Workforce Workgroup for two years, during 2015 and 2016.

The Vermont Legislature recognized the important role NDs play in the provision of health care services, and helped to increase access to NDs, by requiring insurers to cover the same services for NDs that they cover for MDs and other providers, by recognizing the primary care physician status of NDs, and by guaranteeing the opportunity for NDs to credential with the Blueprint for Health and operate as Patient Centered Medical Homes.

Background - Naturopathic Physicians

Naturopathic physicians have been licensed in VT to provide routine physician health services along with preventive medicine and integrative care since 1996. NDs complete rigorous 4-5 year medical school programs, following a bachelor's degree with standard premed requirements. The profession is regulated by the VT Secretary of State's Office of Professional Regulation, which requires passage of national board examinations including advanced pharmacology and ongoing continuing medical education throughout a naturopathic physician's career.

All NDs are trained as PCPs, although some go on to specialize in disciplines such as midwifery or integrative oncology. 88% of the 69 NDs practicing in Vermont deliver primary care. ND care consists of basic primary care services, such as well child checks, immunizations, routine gynecological services, breast and cervical cancer screenings, and care of most acute and chronic conditions. We utilize standard laboratory and imaging diagnostics, perform standard physical exams, and seek the least invasive – which is usually the least expensive treatment - that will be effective for any given condition. For example, a mild to moderate cholesterol problem can often be addressed through diet, fish oil and exercise, but when needed, we are able to prescribe both natural and conventional statin medications.

Workforce and Access

There are 69 total NDs practicing in Vermont. Their distribution is illustrated in the two maps in the VDH handout. The first map illustrates distribution by county, while the second illustrates distribution by Blueprint Service Area. 88% of them, for a total of 61, provide primary care.

95% of primary care NDs are accepting new patients, 82% of ND PCPs participate with Medicaid, and the majority, 78.7%, are accepting new Medicaid Patients.

The field is growing nationally, and in Vermont. When I started to practice here in 1995 there were 2 naturopathic medical colleges in the U.S. Today there are 7. In 1995, there were 8 NDs in the state. Today there are 69. Their median age is young: 40. Less than 3% plan to retire in the next 12 months, while 94.2% plan to work the same amount or increase their hours. Given these demographics along with the aging/retiring trend among MD/DO PCPs, we expect naturopathic physicians to play an increasing role in the primary care physician workforce in the future.

Proposed Amendment

Based on the important role that NDs play in providing primary care to Vermonters, we request the following amendment:

33 V.S.A. § 1852. UNIVERSAL PRIMARY CARE

(a)(2) Services provided by a licensed health care provider in one of the following primary care specialty types shall be included in universal primary care when providing services in one of the primary care service categories described in subdivision (1) of this subsection:

(xx) naturopathic physicians

Thank you very much for your consideration.