

Testimony in Support of SB 533
March 26, 2013

Submitted by Theresa Russell, BSN, MSN, FNP
Olive Branch Family Health Inc.

Chair Beyer and Members of the Committee: Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of SB 533, which would extend the time Nurse Practitioners (NPs) can treat a workers' compensation patient and authorize time loss to 180 days.

NP's in Oregon practice independently and provide comprehensive care. Our scope of practice includes the diagnosis of illness and disease, treating, and prescribing and dispensing medications, and does not require that we practice with physician supervision. As such, I practice as Family Nurse Practitioner at my own clinic, Olive Branch Family Health Inc. We opened it October 18, 2010. At this time, we have approximately 1100 patients in our electronic data base. I am in solo practice and have an independent pharmacy in the same building.

In my experience, I can usually tell if a workers' compensation claim is going to be complicated enough to warrant a referral to a specialist or a physician during the patient's first visit. With the injured workers I treat, after 1 to 3 office visits we typically have a good resolution. Occasionally we need more than 90 days to deal with on-going physical therapy or IV antibiotics. In these cases it would be beneficial to be able to follow the patient and keep the continuum of care with the provider they have been seeing. We develop a provider/patient relationship that includes trust and confidentiality.

Under current law, as a Nurse Practitioner, once my workers' compensation patient hits the 90 day mark, I'm required to refer them to a physician. I once had a patient that had to have back surgery from her work injury. I referred her to a surgeon but her outcome was not what we had hoped for. She needed to be managed on medications chronically. Because it was more than 90 days I had to refer her to a physician. He resented it, I resented it, and the patient resented it. There was no reason that needed to happen except for a law that did not fit the case. We made the best of it, but I never forgot it.

My community has 8 providers, two full time family practice physicians, one physician assistant, one pediatric nurse practitioner, myself as a full time provider, and 3 part time family practice providers. This may sound like a lot for a community of 7200 people but access to a consistent provider is not always available. The full time doctors take call at the local hospital and are in clinic only 2-3 days per week. I am available 5 days a week. I am very busy partly because of this availability. Once you leave I-84 at La Grande there are 2 providers in Elgin, about 20 miles from La Grande. It is 60 miles to Enterprise from there for the next medical care.

Limiting the time that a Nurse Practitioner can treat a workers compensation patient—in addition to interrupting continuity of care—can pose significant challenges for a patient who has to be seen by a physician at 90 days. In many cases, this would mean that a patient has to travel, and has to wait for an appointment with a provider who doesn't know this patient's history.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit these comments.

Please support SB 533.