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Improving Provider Access for Injured Workers
SB 533

Chair Beyer, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. I am here in support of SB 533 and want to express my gratitude to the Management-Labor Advisory Committee for bringing it forward. I am the Regional Manager for Occupational Health for Providence Health & Services. I am also a nurse practitioner with over fifteen years experience.

As has already been noted, SB 533 will extend the period of time nurse practitioners may treat injured workers from 90 to 180 days. Current state law only allows these providers to treat claimants for 90 days before the nurse practitioner must refer to a physician. The impact on patients is that they must often undergo the hassle of finding another provider, undergoing another initial exam, and potential delay of the claim. I have watched this happen over and over in my own practice.

As noted in the 2005-2006 Nurse Practitioner Study Final Report presented to MLAC in September 2006, 21 percent of non-disabling claims (where patients miss fewer than 3 days of work) and 31 percent of disabling claims take longer than 90 days to close. It can take up to 60 days for a claim to even be approved. The common types of workplace injuries nurse practitioners treat often resolve in 120-140 days. The 90 day limit results in unnecessary referrals, often delaying the closing of these claims and increasing costs. I have found the results of this study reflected in my experience as a provider, and that of the nurse practitioners and doctors currently working within my clinics.

SB 533 will allow nurse practitioners to stay as the attending provider while working in collaboration with specialists. During many of the claims that extend beyond 90 days, we are partnering with specialists such as orthopedic surgeons. By the time a patient has had a claim approved and had surgery we are at times already beyond the 90-day period. SB 533 will allow patients to continue under the treatment and care of their nurse practitioner at the end of their claim instead of undertaking the difficult process of finding a new provider who is willing to see them at the end of a nearly completed claim.

SB 533 will reduce costs to insurers and provide an improved continuum of care for patients. Oregon's nurse practitioners have shown they can provide a high quality treatment option at no increased cost to insurers. Nurse practitioners are in fact serving an increasing role in primary care and the treatment of injured workers, in both rural and urban areas.

The adoption of SB 533 would help ease the issue of access and improve the continuum of care by improving services and assisting our injured workers in finding the care they need.

I would once again like to express my appreciation to the members of MLAC for all of their hard work over the past two years examining the issue of provider access within the worker compensation system. They have spent significant time reviewing this issue and I believe SB 533 provides needed changes within the system. I urge you to support this bill.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today and would be happy to answer any questions.