

SB 631 – Written Testimony

Date: May 4, 2015

To: Chair Monnes Anderson and Members of the Senate Committee on Health Care

From: Kyle Cleys

Dear Chair Monnes Anderson and Members of the Committee:

I am a resident in Northeast Portland in House District 45. I fully support implementing universal single-payer health care in Oregon. You will hear from others that it is the equitable thing to do, it will prevent physical suffering and financial ruin, it will be much simpler and it will result in great cost savings for our state. I endorse those arguments so I won't repeat them here. Instead, I would like to ask you to make sure that The Health Care for All Oregon Plan does not contain support or funding for unscientific medical practices, often called Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM).

I was a believer in alternative medicine until I learned the hard way how ineffective and harmful it can be. I now suffer constant neck pain and tinnitus because of injuries inflicted by a chiropractor. I initially chalked this up to unusual bad luck until I started researching chiropractic in particular and alternative medicine in general. What I've discovered has been a real eye-opening experience. I've learned that the neck manipulations chiropractors perform are ineffective for any condition and regularly lead to injuries, strokes and death. Since I wasn't given this information before undergoing this procedure I was denied the opportunity to give informed consent, but that appears to be common practice among chiropractors. The entire chiropractic profession is built around belief in discarded nineteenth-century "vitalism" and the correction of non-existent "subluxations". Spinal Manipulative Therapy (SMT) as chiropractors practice can be of some benefit in the treatment of some low back pain, but it's no better than other procedures like physical therapy. In addition, other therapists can also do SMT and they're better educated and just as skilled as chiropractors. Consumers Union, publisher of *Consumer Reports*, came to the following conclusion:

Overall, Consumers Union believes that chiropractic is a significant hazard to many patients. Current licensing laws, in our opinion, lend an aura of legitimacy to unscientific practices and serve to protect the chiropractor rather than the public. In effect, those laws allow persons with limited qualifications to practice medicine under another name.¹

I've also tried naturopathy and acupuncture in the past under the same illusion as I was under regarding chiropractic, namely that since they're licensed they must be safe and effective. Nothing could be further from the truth. All of these practices suffer from magical thinking that defy medical knowledge and can't stand up to scientific scrutiny. Acupuncture relies on belief in pre-scientific concepts of vital force qi flowing through meridians, neither of which have been shown to exist. Acupuncture has been extensively studied, but it just doesn't pan out as more than placebo for anything except perhaps for weak evidence that it might provide some minor

¹ Editors of Consumer Reports Books. *Health Quackery: Consumers Union's Report on False Health Claims, Worthless Remedies, and Unproved Therapies*. Mount Vernon, NY: Consumers Union, 1980, p. 198.

temporary relief for some pain and nausea. Acupuncture is fairly safe, but even here, infections and injuries to vital organs do occur.

Like chiropractic, naturopathic philosophy is based on a belief in vitalism. Naturopaths sometimes provide sensible advice about nutrition and exercise, but much of what they do is pseudoscience. They often make diagnoses that are rejected by evidence-based medicine and their treatments can range from ridiculous and ineffective like homeopathy to downright dangerous when real medical intervention is delayed. A large percentage of naturopaths and chiropractors also oppose recommended vaccination schedules.

Alternative medicine is really just another way of describing unproven treatments. It makes no sense to have one standard for conventional medicine requiring a balance of risks and benefits and another standard for alternative medicine where anything goes. SB 631 includes coverage for chiropractic, acupuncture and naturopathy. These should be removed from any legislation going forward. We should not be lending legitimacy to unscientific, ineffective and sometimes dangerous pseudo medical practices. And we certainly shouldn't be wasting public money on such nonsense when there are so many other pressing needs. It seems likely that in any plan the specific benefits covered will be decided by a designated board with input from qualified experts. This board is designated as the *Health Care for All Oregon Board* in SB 631. Therefore, we should not tie the hands of such a board now by specifying coverage for things that evidence-based decisions will almost certainly exclude.

So, yes, by all means we need universal single-payer health care in Oregon as soon as possible, but please, let's not endanger peoples' health and waste resources by including coverage for sham medicine.

Thank you,

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