

February 10, 2019

Subject: Oregon Association of Naturopathic Physicians Pay Parity Bill

Dear Senate and Health Care Committees,

My name is Andrea Pinger and I am a Naturopathic Physician. I would like to share my experience working as an ND to show the importance of this profession in the delivery of quality healthcare in the state of Oregon, and the barriers that we face in trying to deliver this care.

For the last two years, I have worked as a provider of urgent and primary care at ZOOM+Care. Prior to that, I practiced full-time as a solo practitioner in my own private practice for five years. I earned my Naturopathic degree at Bastyr University in Seattle (a four-year program), followed by two years of full-time residency at the National University of Natural Medicine in Portland.

Through my years of practice, I cannot begin to describe the financial difficulties faced by NDs, not only in terms of salary, but also the difficulties in paying back our enormous student loan debt. During my years of private practice, I felt extremely frustrated by the constant insurance denials, low reimbursement rates (low in general, and especially when compared to other provider types), and the exclusions or limitations placed on naturopathic care for patients. My biller was inundated with insurance appeals, often which were never resolved or paid, which cost the clinic time, resources, and income. It was hard to make even a small salary, despite being a fairly busy practice. This eventually led me to close my clinic in search of a salaried position.

I continually hear from patients: “you are the first doctor who has listened to me or taken more than 5-10 minutes with me”, “I can tell you really care”, “I appreciate that you can blend conventional medicine with more gentle, natural therapies”. I believe that this is the type of collaborate care that many patients are seeking, and that we deserve to get compensated for our education, time/services, and medical expertise. In the setting where I currently work, I provide the quality medical care that is equivalent to my Physician Assistants and Nurse Practitioner colleagues, though we get reimbursed by insurance companies at a significantly lower rate compared to them. This has led ZOOM+Care to cut ND pay over the past year by 25%, even though I am doing the EXACT same work as I was before. Medicine is changing, and it is time for these inequalities to change as well.

I am asking that you vote yes on the Naturopathic Physician Pay Parity bill.

Sincerely,

Andrea Pinger, ND, LAc
ZOOM+Care, Wilsonville, Oregon