

Anton L. Alder, ND

February 11, 2019

In support of SB 734 - Oregon Association of Naturopathic Physicians Pay Parity Bill

Dear Senate and Health Care Committees,

My name is Anton Alder. I am a naturopathic physician practicing in rural eastern Oregon. While I was going to school in Bridgeport, Connecticut from 2013-2017, I was privileged to be involved in legislative efforts for my profession. Given that experience, I would like to share with you some of my knowledge both as an ND and as an active citizen to illustrate the importance that this profession plays in delivering quality healthcare throughout the state of Oregon, and the barriers that we face in trying to deliver this care.

If I may for a quick moment refer back to the school I attended, the University of Bridgeport. I feel it is important to note that the health science division included a school of naturopathic medicine, a physician's assistant program, and a few other medical professional programs. Due to this and my experience with legislation in Connecticut I have a firm grasp of the educational requirements for physician's assistants as they compare to naturopathic physicians. Naturopathic physicians undergo 4 or more years of medical school after completing a bachelor's degree and meeting pre-requisites for the various programs throughout the US and Canada. During their time in school approximately half the time is dedicated to sciences that govern medical practices and the remainder is dedicated to clinical application and practice. Each of these programs includes a large number of hours spent in clinical practice under the supervision of licensed medical professionals. Each graduate must undergo two general board examinations to become eligible for licensure. In Oregon, additional board exams are required in the topics of minor surgery and pharmacology. In every comparison of the topics covered, hours spent, clinical experience, and so forth, more is required of naturopathic physicians to become license eligible than their physician's assistant counterparts. Now of course it makes sense that physicians would be required to do more than physician's assistants to become licensed and practice. Likewise you would expect that the physicians would be paid at the minimum the same rate as physician's assistants if not more when billing for the same codes. Interestingly, in Oregon, naturopathic physicians are consistently being paid less than physician's assistants when billing for the same treatment codes.

Naturopathic physicians have a significant role in delivering healthcare to many of Oregon's constituents. Our expertise in drug-less treatments has made us valuable allies in combating the opioid epidemic. For some we are part of a larger network of healthcare providers working hand in hand to provide care. For others we may be the primary or even sole providers delivering healthcare for them. In my relatively new practice approximately half of the patients I see would consider me their primary care provider. I have helped people with a wide variety of conditions find

health with decreased need for recurring prescriptions or office visits. However, reimbursement and insurance coverage issues have already been a considerable issue for me and my practice. Due to the historically poor reimbursement rates, I am forced to be selective in the insurances I can afford to accept, which severely limits who can seek care and how often they may visit me regardless of their healthcare needs. This is most unfortunate in an area already hurting to find providers. As I am the only naturopathic physician between The Dalles and La Grande, the clinic has received numerous calls looking to schedule visits only to be disheartened that insurance would not cover their visit.

As a small rural area, many of the people who seek my services already have few choices in healthcare and some are forced to cross the river to Washington in search of better options. In poor weather, such as the recent snow storms we have had sweep through eastern Oregon, many Oregonians find themselves cut off from their providers. This is unacceptable. Oregonians deserve to have affordable healthcare choices available to them in their own state! Ensuring that insurances reimburse fairly for same services regardless of provider type could easily reduce this burden.

Naturopathic physicians deserve to be reasonably paid for providing healthcare services. Oregon has previously demonstrated its resolve to healthcare by issuing statutory protected pay for physician's assistants and nurse practitioners. I now ask that our legislators step up and pay naturopathic physicians their fair share as well. For the sake of my colleagues, myself and all our patients I humbly request that you support SB 734 and bring pay parity to NDs in Oregon.

Sincerely,

Anton L Alder, ND