

FROM THE DESK OF

Laura Lewman, ND

February 15, 2021

Re: HB2673, Support Fair Pay for Naturopathic Doctors (NDs)

Dear House and Senate Health Care Committees, Oregon Legislature,

My name is Laura Lewman and I am a Naturopathic Doctor (ND). I would like to share my experiencing working as an ND in Oregon in hopes that you will support HB2673.

I became a naturopathic doctor to be able to offer a new perspective to my patients on how to heal their bodies. This might involve discussing nutrition, exercise, stress reduction, and other natural modalities that can help alleviate symptoms, and importantly, prevent disease. We know that the leading causes of disease and death in the United States are primarily lifestyle-related. That means with the right education and support, many patients have the ability to heal themselves without the aide of expensive medication, diagnostic procedures, and surgeries. This is not to say that there isn't a time and place for all of these treatments, but preventing patients from needing these services is chief among my goals as an ND.

My career journey took me away from a typical naturopathic private practice to urgent care at ZOOM+Care. While working at ZOOM+Care, I have had the unique opportunity to help my patients with not only the amazing things I mentioned above, but also with prescribing medicines for acute illnesses such as influenza, urinary tract infection, and strep throat; assessing and referring to emergency services for life-threatening conditions such as appendicitis, heart failure, acute alcohol withdrawal, and possible stroke; and splinting fractures and suturing up lacerations. I give vaccinations, medication injections, order lab tests, perform routine screenings, and diagnose patients with chronic medical problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure, HIV, and liver disease, and refer them to appropriate specialists for ongoing management.

Though I am trained to provide every single one of these services, I am not always compensated fairly. At ZOOM+Care, I work alongside physician assistants and nurse practitioners who are often reimbursed at much higher rates for the exact same service. An ND who sutures up a laceration for one patient might get reimbursed absolutely nothing, while a physician assistant who sutures up another gets reimbursed the going insurance contracted rate. This occurs time and time again no matter what the rendered medical service. In 2017, this insurance pay disparity resulted in a 25% pay cut across the board for all ND's employed at my company. As you can imagine, this financial hit was devastating for me, my family, and my ND colleagues.

It is my firm belief that few people go into naturopathic medicine to make money; rather, it is a deep desire and mission to help people become healthier and happier for longer. Naturopathic doctors are forced to make the difficult choice between having a cash-based, no insurance practice, and thereby effectively reducing the number and diversity of patients who they are able to help, or accepting insurance and shouldering the burden of low or no reimbursement. Either choice can result in severe financial hardship, the struggle to manage clinic costs, repaying student loans, and raising a family.

Please help us to fulfill our mission to create a healthier country and vote yes on HB2673 to support fair pay for Naturopathic Doctors.

Yours in health and hope,

Laura Lewman, ND