

February 7, 2022

Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Kennemer and Members of the Senate Committee Health Care,

My name is Jayesh Palshikar, I am a registered nurse. I have worked as a nurse in hospitals for 18 years. As an acute care nurse, I regularly work with patients and families with brain injury, generally related to stroke. I have learned that not only is the injury difficult for the patient, but navigating the system to make plans for "what is next" can be confusing at best and sets a patient up for a failed discharge, resulting in delays in necessary care, delays in leveraging resources and delays in support for both patient and family.

This issue is also near and dear to me because not only am I a nurse, but because I am a brain injury survivor. I have no memory of the bicycle accident that changed my life so dramatically, only that I was bicycling and then woke up in the back of an ambulance. Brain injury was not identified at the time, so I quickly returned to working at the job I love at a hospital. But something was very wrong and I was not able to work effectively or safely. I was terrified when I walked out of the hospital on medical leave, instructed to take care of myself before coming back to care for patients.

I was unsure if I would be able to return to work at the hospital, and I reached out to a private brain injury support group, where I was able to make a plan to follow up with doctors, specialists and access hospital benefits to put me on the trajectory to heal. Navigating the systems necessary for healing and returning to optimal function requires exactly what brain injury patients struggle with: effective brain functioning.

I wish to contrast my story with another coworker: another nurse I worked with also sustained a brain injury and returned to work as soon as physically able. Similar to my experience at the same employer, my friend also struggled at work. Instead of taking medical leave and making a plan for brain healing, my coworker was fired and eventually their nursing license was suspended due to the time working with a brain injury.

What was the difference between myself and my friend? I found a brain injury support group and at work I had administrators who encouraged me to focus on my health. In short, I was lucky. My friend was not. Neither of us had a health care navigator and unfortunately the State of Oregon now has one fewer dedicated nurse during a pandemic when we need every nurse willing to help shoulder the load of this tragic pandemic.

Both stories illustrate the critical importance of a navigator. It should not be reserved for the lucky few who happen to find a support group.

SB 1528 would do just that, investing in the infrastructure that will allow individuals and families to navigate the various systems and opportunities that feel especially Byzantine after a brain injury. This bill will help Oregonians and their families to return to living their best life, and is an investment in Oregonians who have invested in the state for decades.

Please pass and fully fund SB 1528.

Submitted respectfully,
Jayesh Palshikar RN, BS