

Testimony to OR Senate Health Committee regarding SB607

Good afternoon, Senator Patterson and members of the Senate Committee on Health Care. I speak today in strong support of Senate Bill 607, which asks you, our representative legislators to investigate current membership of the Oregon Pain Management Commission.

My name is Joseph Gramer and I reside in Salem. I've no financial or other conflicts of interest. I'm the most basic of all stakeholders in that for 10 years plus I've lived with disabling, intractable chronic pain. I'm a patient.

I'm not here to recite my litany of failed treatments, nor to trot out instances of anti-opiate stigma and medical abandonment which myself, along with countless others, have unjustly suffered due to misapplication of CDC guidelines, government intrusion in doctor-patient relationships, and deliberate anti-opiate misinformation. As an aside, I'll note that, within the nationwide chronic pain community, Oregon has become notorious for a kind of opiophobic fundamentalism among key health panels and officials. In this context, Oregon was even called out in the 2018 Human Rights Watch report, "Not Allowed to be Compassionate." I'd urge you all to look that up.

Now, about the OPMC.

Soon after my wife and I moved to Oregon in late 2015, I learned of the existence of the Oregon Pain Management Commission. I was thrilled initially, as their posted mission statement made them out to be real allies for patients like me. Lots of good stuff there, but for time's sake I'll just quote this: "The confusion and misconceptions of tolerance, physical dependence, and addiction contribute to the problem of poor pain management." And this, "Fear of causing addiction to opioids is a major barrier to appropriate pain management."

Unfortunately, a tad more digging alerted me to the now infamous Guideline Note 50, an insidious plan to forcibly strip life-enabling pain medicine from people with back and spinal pain; people on Medicaid, that is – the most vulnerable folks in our disabled community. I sadly realized maybe these commissioners are not our friends. At an OPMC meeting, I encountered a group of people whose overall focus and goal seemed to be stamping out opiate-based pain medicine, regardless of patients' individual diagnoses, histories, or circumstances.

On a positive note, they advocated for some non-medicinal treatments which seem to help some people, PT, acupuncture and the like. But it's like we were carpenters and they were saying, "We'll help you get tape measures and nail pouches. But we're taking away your hammers."

Testifying, I cited parts of this ((PRINT-OUT)) a copy I'd made of their own mission statement at that time, reminding them that their own website stated that opiates clearly have benefits as well as risks; an important place in pain management for some patients. OPMC members didn't

seem to appreciate this reminder. By strange coincidence, within days of that meeting their website material changed. Balanced statements regarding medicinal pain management vanished. Rigid anti-opiate opinions became the norm.

In that and subsequent encounters with the OPMC, once they had my number as a proponent of the benefits of these medicines – for so many of us a godsend and critical aid for functionality and quality of life – commissioners treated me with condescension at best, if not outright hostility. Another patient advocate and I were characterized rather unkindly in the commission's minutes. In the years since, as new members were picked, a shared radical anti-opioid agenda seems to have been the chief qualifying factor – far exceeding any real care and concern for pain patients' actual experience, and for individualized pain management. The OPMC has abandoned the balance, and humanity it was formed to embody. For many disabled Oregonians with intractable pain, the OPMC has become a pretty sinister group, deaf to us, doing much more harm than good.

With that, senators, I urge you to please hear the Oregon pain community's demand for fairness, respect, and compassion – in this and other matters. Please champion and pass Senate Bill 607. Thank you for listening.