

Written Testimony Submitted by Andrea Dillaway-Huber, PhD, RD, LDN

House Democratic Policy Committee Public Hearing

April 9, 2012

Since I am unable to testify in person, I am submitting my written testimony to be entered into the hearing's record. My name is Dr. Andrea Dillaway-Huber. I am a Registered and Licensed Dietitian from Wyomissing, Pennsylvania and I am asking that you work on legislation that would recognize Registered Dietitians as providers in all health insurance plans in our state.

I currently have a private practice specializing in pediatric and adolescent weight management and eating disorders and I am not a preferred provider for any insurance companies. Why? Insurance companies do not consistently recognize our credentials or us under their plans. If they do, I spend hours and multiple phone calls trying to get my patients coverage, only to find, as happened just recently, that I was asked to accept \$24 for a \$140 visit, which represents a net loss of income for my business.

I maintain a solid physician referral basis in my area, but many times patients end up not scheduling an appointment since I am not a provider under any insurance plans. Physicians get frustrated, patients get frustrated, and I too am frustrated. These patients often do not get the care they need for nutrition related concerns. Or, they turn to other less educated trainers, chiropractors, and nurses who do not have the extensive training and proven outcomes provided by a Registered and Licensed Dietitian. I hear story after story in my practice of misinformation provided by "alternative" providers. We could save Pennsylvania money and improve health if we were universally accepted as preferred providers receiving fair reimbursement for services.

MNT (medical nutrition therapy) is a medical service that has been proven to be safe and medically effective. The key to the effectiveness of these services is the registered dietitian as the provider of the service. The Institute of Medicine has previously acknowledged the registered dietitian as the "single identifiable group of health-care professionals with standardized education, clinical training, continuing education and national credentialing requirements necessary" to be recognized as providers of these services.

Insurance companies for many reasons must credential dietitians. First and foremost, Pennsylvania recognizes that a Registered and Licensed Dietitian is a qualified provider of nutrition services. Also, multiple studies support the fact that evidence based nutrition practices reduce health care costs and improve outcomes. In addition, physicians do not have the time or expertise and training to properly address nutritional issues with their patients. In medical school, physicians receive minimal nutrition education, most completing only one course.

Patients depend on the fact that they will be cared for by the health specialist with the best knowledge and training to meet their specific health needs. The Licensed, Registered Dietitian is the most highly qualified health specialist in terms of educational background and practical training to both assess and provide nutrition intervention for their patients. So scope of practice would suggest that a dietitian better serves a patient's nutritional needs while a physician addresses and cares for their other health needs.

The financial impact on the economy for absenteeism, lost wages, productivity and quality of life is tremendous for patients unless evidence based nutrition practice provided by a registered and licensed dietitian is implemented in the patient's plan of care.

Once again, I ask that you work on legislation that would recognize Registered Dietitians as providers in all health insurance plans in our state. Our citizens/we deserve consistent access to these licensed healthcare professionals.

Best regards,

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