

April Rudat, Registered Dietitian LLC

Dietitian in Private Practice Providing Nutrition Counseling & Medical Nutrition Therapy

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Written Testimony Submitted by April Rudat, 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 April Rudat, MS Ed, RD, LDN, and I am a dietitian in private practice in Moscow, PA. I also work at Marywood University in Scranton, PA as faculty and as the Student Health Services Consultant Dietitian. I am the author of two books, "Oh Yes You Can Breastfeed Twins!" and "Truck Drivers: Stop Your Job from Killing You! The Dietitians' Guide to Smart Eating and Healthy Living" (co-authored with dietitian Sharon Madalis). I hold a Master's degree in Counseling from Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA, and I received my Bachelor of Science in Dietetics from Indiana University of Pennsylvania in Indiana, PA. I completed my year-long dietetic internship at Geisinger Medical Center in Danville, PA, and I am credentialed as a Registered Dietitian (RD) through the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics/Commission on Dietetic Registration and licensed in Pennsylvania as a Licensed Dietitian/Nutritionist (LDN).

In my private practice each day, I see patients – both adults and children – who struggle with eating disorders or weight management. I tailor my nutritional recommendations to each individual who sits before me, and I teach the art of nutritional balance and eating mindfully, healthfully, and according to one's hunger and fullness signals. This skill set is unique to Registered Dietitians, and the research evidence upon which we Registered Dietitians are trained is extensive and scientifically valid. We Registered Dietitians are an integral part of prevention and treatment of many diseases, and we are key practitioners in the war on obesity.

In my private practice, I bill for medical nutrition therapy using the CPT codes 97802 and 97803. I have had success in gaining provider status, in billing, and in being reimbursed using the following plans:

- Aetna
- Blue Cross of Northeastern Pennsylvania, First Priority Health
- Blue Cross of Northeastern Pennsylvania, First Priority Life Insurance Company
- Highmark Federal Employee Program

I have not had success when attempting to bill for medical nutrition therapy with several other plans, including Highmark Blue Shield. Ironically, I did obtain provider status with

Highmark Blue Shield; however, when initially working with my first patient with this plan, coverage was denied. The patient was told via phone that she could see a Registered Dietitian for a \$0 co-pay for unlimited visits, but when I called Highmark to obtain a mailing address for my CMS 1500 claim (bill for service), a representative told me only licensed providers could use the CPT codes 97802 and 97803. Upon telling her that I was a Licensed Dietitian Nutritionist in Pennsylvania, she then informed me that only a physician or chiropractor could use medical nutrition therapy codes. Finally, the representative told me that my patient could travel to see a Highmark-employed Registered Dietitian at a Highmark Community Clinic site, but the closest site to my patient was over one hour away. This patient has been seeing me for more than a year now, and she has been paying out of pocket, a fee-for-service, for sessions every other week. This person, a 50-year-old woman, struggles with a life-long eating disorder and needs weekly visits with a specialized dietitian such as myself, not a Community Clinic dietitian more than 1-hour away from her home.

In addition, with the aforementioned plans for which I am a provider, I also experience difficulty with so many of my patients in that there is often a 6-visit limit per calendar year. Can a Registered Dietitian really end obesity in 6 visits? Can a life-threatening eating disorder such as anorexia nervosa be effectively treated in 6 visits? Documented treatment time for eating disorders is 2 – 8 years with the recommendation for weekly visits with a treatment team including a Registered Dietitian, a therapist, a physician, and a psychiatrist.

I do hope this letter will provide a glimpse into reimbursement issues of Registered Dietitians – skilled, trained experts in nutrition – who are attempting to bill insurance companies for medical nutrition therapy for the prevention and treatment of many diseases. These include eating disorders, obesity, diabetes, kidney disease and others for which appropriate medical nutrition therapy administered by a Registered Dietitian can both save lives as well as significantly reduce medical costs associated with long term complications.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Thank you for your time,

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