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GEISINGER
HEALTH SYSTEM

Written Testimony Submitted by CYNTHIA M BRYLINSKY
House Democratic Policy Committee Public Hearing
April 9, 2012

House Democratic Policy Committee:

Since I am unable to testify in person, I am submitting my written testimony to be entered into the records of this hearing.

I am writing to you as an individual who has been employed in health care for the past 30 years. I started my career as a Registered Dietitian (and I maintain those credentials), but have expanded my career at Geisinger in a role outside of dietetics. I have served as the VP of Operations of one of Geisinger's hospitals as well as having interim responsibility last year for the Third Party Contracting area. As such, I believe I am in a unique position to understand the challenges facing hospitals, health care providers and insurance companies in the current environment.

I am writing to ask that you work on legislation that would recognize Registered Dietitians (RDs) as providers in all health insurance plans in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Healthcare reform and federal and state budget deficit issues have combined to highlight the need of the healthcare industry to improve value related to collaboration, accountability and communication, performance improvement (elimination of variation, unsafe practices and waste), and use of data and metrics to force continual improvement in the care provided to patients. Keeping our population healthier, focusing on preventable readmissions and assuring high quality care are paramount as healthcare reform moves forward.

One of the keys to providing high quality care to patients is to assure their diet is optimal based on their health status. There are countless disease processes which are directly impacted by diet – diabetes, hypertension, cancer, cardiovascular disease etc. Nutrition interventions, provided by a RD, can reduce and even eliminate the need for costly long-term medications to treat chronic diseases. Counseling patients on a healthy diet is a cost-effective strategy that can prevent complications and readmissions and help PA's efforts to meet the fiscal challenges of healthcare reform.

Geisinger has been recognized as a leader in health care reform by President Obama and many others. Currently, Geisinger has realized that keeping employees "well" by encouraging a healthier lifestyle is important in helping to control long-term costs

and to improve productivity and absenteeism. MyHealth Rewards is a new annual enrollment program that will provide employees with numerous options for enhancing personal well-being, adopting a healthier lifestyle, and/or managing chronic or serious health conditions. Visits with a registered dietitian are part of this effort.

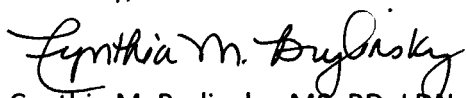
In the past, I practiced as a dietitian working with pediatric patients. Nutrition counseling is an extremely important part of the medical treatment of many children in areas such as a seizure disorder (ketogenic diet), diabetes or a multitude of genetic disorders. To many of these parents and children, the dietitian is their primary source of information, as the diet is a cornerstone to their child's health. If the dietitians' services are not covered, these parents would not have a source of information for the treatment of their children. Diets in these children are so specific; no other health care provider could even begin to offer the type of information conveyed by a dietitian.

Once again, I would ask that you work on legislation that would recognize Registered Dietitians as providers by all health insurance plans in the commonwealth. Currently, coverage for medical nutrition therapy provided by RDs is not consistently recognized by providers under their plans. RDs are licensed in the state of Pennsylvania, yet are not afforded coverage of their services on a routine basis. The impact of this lack of coverage is significant, as many patients are denied the access to the cost-effective services of an RD as a result of this lack of recognition.

The licensed Registered Dietitian is the recognized nutrition expert and must be included as providers in all insurance plans so that plan recipients receive appropriate care. Registered Dietitians have both the formal nutrition education and training necessary to provide the best possible nutrition intervention for our citizens.

Feel free to contact me if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,



Cynthia M. Brylinsky, MS, RD, LDN

Vice President, Financial & Decision Support Systems