

**Written Testimony Submitted by Jennifer Palauskas BS, 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 Jennifer Palauskas BS, RD, LDN. I am a Registered Dietitian from Scranton, Pennsylvania and I am here today asking that you work on legislation that would recognize Registered Dietitians (RD) as providers in all health insurance plans in our state.

We are licensed healthcare providers in the state, yet insurance companies do not consistently recognize us and credential us as providers under their plans. This creates barriers to access cost-effective services that could save our state money and improve the health of our citizens. It also creates health disparities among our citizens. For example, a gentleman called the hospital where I work for diet instruction on weight loss, after he had been educated on diabetes by a Nurse Practitioner who works in a physician's office. The nurse practitioner was covered by his insurance, while a RD is not. The nurse reviewed the information so quickly that the patient didn't fully understand it. So, a RD was asked to instruct the patient. If a Registered Dietitian, trained in both medical nutrition therapy for both obesity and diabetes treatment, had given the instruction originally, he/she would have first customized a treatment plan for both co-morbidities including appropriate follow up recommendations. Also, Registered Dietitians are trained to measure outcomes of our intervention. In this case, the patient was provided with a quiz at the end of our counseling to assess his knowledge. The patient was very pleased with the instruction that he received from the RD and felt his healthcare was individualized and not just part of a "cookie cutter fix-it plan".

Recognition of RDs by insurance plans is critical Registered Dietitians are licensed healthcare providers in the state, meaning the state has already recognized the fact that we are qualified providers of nutrition services. We are also nutrition experts and the most highly qualified) providers of nutrition services. We have all had at least 4 years of nutrition education, including instruction on every disease state. We have all passed a comprehensive examination administered by the Commission on Dietetic Registration. We must complete continuing education to maintain our registration and state license. Physicians don't have the time to provide nutrition education to their patients. - In addition, they have minimal training in nutrition. Nurses also generally are only required to complete one nutrition course during their schooling.

There is a multitude of data that demonstrates the cost-savings of RD-provided nutrition counseling. As just one example, a study conducted at Massachusetts General Hospital demonstrated a savings of \$4.28 for each dollar spent on MNT. MNT services provided by RDs are less expensive than physician office visits and hospitalizations for complications of disease such as diabetes that could be averted by nutrition interventions. Also, nutrition interventions can reduce and even eliminate the need for costly long-term medications to treat chronic diseases.

Nutrition and diet are known to be associated with seven of the top ten leading causes of death in the United States today, including the Big Three: heart disease, cancer and stroke. Diet and nutrition are also factors in other chronic conditions such as pulmonary disease, diabetes, liver disease, arteriosclerosis and kidney disease. Diet and nutrition have a major role in curbing the obesity epidemic facing both children and adults across our state. Lack of access to RD-provided medical nutrition therapy services certainly has played a role in the escalating prevalence of these conditions and the associated growth in the costs of treating them. Opening up access to these services from the nutrition experts can help to rein in spiraling health care costs in our state.

MNT 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.

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 deserve consistent access to these licensed healthcare professionals.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Palauskas  
Registered Dietitian