

Written Testimony Submitted by Karen Peterson, BS, LDN, CDE, RD

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 Karen Peterson. I am a Registered Dietitian and a Diabetes Educator from New Castle, PA and I am writing this today asking that you work on legislation that would recognize Registered Dietitians (RD) as providers in all health insurance plans in our state.

RDs are licensed healthcare providers in the state, yet insurance companies do not consistently recognize us/credential us as providers under their plans. This creates barriers to access to cost-effective services that could save our state money and improve the health of our citizens. This results in health disparities among our citizens.

My problem with insurance companies is that it seems that they make up their own rules. My patients will phone their insurance company to confirm that they have medical nutrition therapy benefits/diabetes benefits and then when I submit the bill I'm either rejected or I never hear from them. Then when I do phone the companies for an explanation it takes forever to get to the correct department. I submit my bills on paper form. It would not be beneficial for me to get the computer program at this point in time to be able to send bill on line vs. via postal service.

I saw six patients last year for a total of 12 visits. I did not get paid for any of my services. They were all diabetics plus 3 patients have Stage 5 Kidney disease. The insurance was Medicare and Highmark/Blue Cross. The one young patient, age 33, had uncontrolled Type I Diabetes. He was seen by an Endocrinologist and was prescribed Medical Nutrition Therapy. He was referred to me to be able to get the Insulin Pump so he could go back to work within a 2-week period. I saw him and his wife in October 2011 and within 2 weeks he received the pump and is doing fine. If I had not seen him he would not have gotten the insulin pump for another 6-8 weeks and delayed from going back to work. His diabetes is in better control since he saw me and feels so much better. The bill was sent to his insurance company and to this date I have not heard if they are going to pay or reject my bill.

I work 2 jobs, a Registered Dietitian and a Diabetes Educator from New Castle; full time for Jameson Health System, for over 30 years, the Diabetic Clinic and Jameson Care Center for long term and short term residents. My part time job is with Fresenius Medical Care, a dialysis unit for which I have worked over 10 years. I am trying to have a private practice to be able to have a part time job when I retire. I feel I can really help improve patients' lives with my knowledge and experience in the diabetes and renal world and to prevent further medical complications which would save money for the insurance companies. I spend about 90 minutes with my patients where MD's spend 15 minutes or less with their patients. I get the comments all the time that their MD or Nurse at MD's office never told them about their disease or medication.

RDs are licensed healthcare providers in the state, meaning the state has already recognized the fact that we are qualified providers of nutrition services; nutrition experts; best-qualified providers of nutrition services; evidence-based practice.

Summary:

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.