

Thank you co-Chairs Thompson and Greenlick and members of the committee for listening to this testimony. My name is Jenny Coulter.

In 2001, I relocated to Oregon to further my career in physical therapy. When I began practicing 18 years ago, I was able to restore people to health following acute illness. Today, this is the exception. Currently, I spend more time educating patients on how to live with limitations, than real recovery. My purpose today is to urge you to consider a paradigm shift from treating illness to promoting the creation of a healthy lifestyle, and to share how Take Shape for Life can help you do this.

How often do we see the television commercials for drugs, many of which include the tag line, "when diet and exercise fail, ask your doctor if drug x is right for you." Did anyone really try diet and exercise? Did they really fail? Countless times patients hear their doctor tell them to "exercise more and eat better". Yet at their next follow-up appointment they will be given a prescription. This is not a treatment aimed at the source of the problem, but one of symptom management. Consumers, healthcare practitioners, legislators and insurers, all of us, need to address this problem, and not the symptoms. Patients need comprehensive education and support to learn the right "prescription" for diet and exercise.

Currently, my practice is with persons too ill to leave their home for treatment. The total cost of caring for these people, including medication, hospitalization, testing, procedures and caregiving is exorbitant. This is mainly due to the resultant medical and physical complications from chronic illnesses such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Nearly every year that I have practiced in Oregon, Oregon's Medicaid programs have had to reduce coverage for services. This is due in part to the increase in the volume of people needing care and the acuity of the care increasing for those receiving treatment.

Personally, over the last decade, I lost my health and through a various set of lifestyle circumstances became inactive, overweight and ill. My physicians and health plan provided me with medications. I was told to change my diet and get more exercise. Even as a physical therapist, I wasn't sure how to make these changes. Last year, I became a client for the Take Shape for Life program. Thus far, I have lost 50 pounds, been able to stop taking 4 prescription medications, reduced my absences from work and returned to all the outdoor activities that my husband and I enjoy. Now I'm paying that forward as a health coach.

In closing, I urge you to take additional action. Please upgrade the focus of Oregon's healthcare delivery system from treating the symptom, to managing the cause. Shift from merely treating disease, to promoting and creating health. The medical demand caused by lifestyle illnesses is too high, and is reducing care, especially at a time of budget shortfalls. But the fiscal savings from this paradigm shift could be even greater.

Thank you for your time and attention to this significant issue.

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