

# *Gresham Acupuncture*

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March 27, 2019

Senate Committee on Health Care

The Honorable Senator Laurie Monnes Anderson, Chair

RE: Support for Senate Bill 887

Chair Monnes Anderson and Members of the Senate Committee on Healthcare:

I am writing to urge your support of Senate Bill 887. Acupuncture is a relatively low-cost treatment for a variety of diagnoses, including pain, stress, and addiction. Acupuncture is an evidence-based alternative to opioid use, which is currently an epidemic in our country, and provides real relief to patients experiencing chronic pain. I have seen these success stories firsthand.

Many patients pay for acupuncture with insurance purchased through their employer. While it is great to see so many plans that include acupuncture, utilization management requirements present administrative hurdles to the delivery of care. While prior authorization is an important tool for controlling the cost of healthcare, acupuncture is such a low-cost treatment that it does not warrant this level of scrutiny. In fact, studies have shown that acupuncture leads to long-term savings in healthcare costs.

Prior authorization requirements are a burden for patients because it requires that they return for treatment **after** authorization has been granted. Not when they are in the most need of treatment. Not when they are able to finally manage to fit an appointment into their busy schedule. Not when they can find transportation or a family member to accompany them to their appointment. Not when the healthcare practitioner knows they need treatment and has an opening. But days, weeks, or months later when the insurance company has reviewed an online request (that is often flawed and limited in the options available for answering medical questions). In many cases, patients never return.

Prior authorization creates a burden for providers like me who run small practices alone or with minimal assistance. Insurance coverage is a contract between the patient and the insurance company. If the company requires a prior authorization, they should require the patient to submit the paperwork (as forms are online and ask questions that indeed are answerable BY THE PATIENT). Extreme increases in

paperwork for healthcare providers reduces available time that could be spent with patients. Every new layer of administration cuts into already narrow margins and threatens the existence of small businesses like mine. It also undermines relationships with patients as they often wrongly blame healthcare providers for difficulties with their insurance company because we are forced to be the go-betweens for their individualized policy. SB 887 would help address this issue by allowing patients to use their acupuncture benefit that they have purchased and is part of their insurance contract.

Prior authorizations also undermine the reputation of Acupuncture as a profession. Acupuncture is not intended as a one-time procedure; it is a course of treatments that builds on prior treatments. When I recommend 8 treatments for a symptom, but the insurance company only authorizes 3 before they require me to spend another 20+ minutes requesting more, they undermine my ability to do my job with optimal outcomes. The break in treatment care continuity often causes regression as the patient has to again wait days, weeks or months for further care. Patients who stop treatment because of this inconvenience come to the conclusion that Acupuncture doesn't work. In reality, it is the prior authorization burden that doesn't work. SB 887 would help address this issue by allowing patients to utilize their acupuncture benefit as a low-cost treatment and prevent the need for costlier interventions. I urge you to vote yes for this bill.

Thank you for your consideration and assistance.

Sincerely,

Leah Yamaguchi, Licensed Acupuncturist