

***Testimony in support of legislation to address workplace safety concerns related to surgical smoke***

Chair Salinas, Vice Chairs Nosse and Hayden and members of the House Health Care Committee:

I have been a surgeon for 27 and have always felt that our routine practice of inhaling surgical smoke is unsafe, yet no one seemed to care. I think we believed, without data, that 1) surgical smoke was “safe” (i.e. that there is ‘good smoke’ and “bad smoke”-which seems ridiculous), and that 2) we surgeons were somehow immune to the potential damage of smoke inhalation (as if our MDs elevated our lungs to some kind of level of safety). In fact, ANY smoke contains dozens if not hundreds of gas phase carcinogens.

I also felt it unbelievable that the average construction worker, fireman, welder, etc. is mandated to wear multiple protections at work, while we surgeons wear none, with the obvious exception of lead vests during the performance of fluoroscopy. Accordingly, as soon as surgical smoke evacuation devices became available approximately 3 years ago I began to use them.

But apparently the damage has already been done: one year ago I had a section of my left lung surgically removed for a tumor. While the tumor may not have been caused by all the smoke I have inhaled over the years, the pathologist the looked at my lung tissue called me and said ‘I did not realize you were a smoker’. I informed him that I’d never smoked a day in my life. He told me that my lung tissue had –as an incidental finding-large amounts of anthracosis. Anthracosis is the black staining commonly seen in the lung tissue of smokers. While I realize this is an anecdote, I must assume that the source of anthracosis in my lung tissue was due to my years of surgical smoke inhalation.

I implore the Oregon Legislature to afford to surgeons the same protective legislation that already protects the health of other professions. I make this plea especially on behalf of younger surgeons and students who do not yet have the degree of anthracosis older surgeons have.

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