



February 1, 2021

Re: HB2673, Support Fair Pay for Naturopathic Doctors (NDs)

Dear Senate and House Health Care Committees,

My name is Dr. Stephanie Culver I am a Naturopathic Doctor (ND) and Chief Medical Officer at Northwest Integrative Medicine. I would like to share my experience working as an ND to show the importance of this profession in the delivery of quality healthcare in the state of Oregon, and the barriers that we face in trying to deliver this care.

I graduated from the National University of Naturopathic Medicine. In addition to the 2 years of didactic education I completed 2 years of clinical rotations (2000+ hours) as well as an additional 1500 hours of clinical rotation in obstetrics and pediatrics. After graduation I completed a three-year CNME certified residency in family medicine, and currently co-supervise two naturopathic residents as the chief medical officer at Northwest Integrative Medicine.

My salary after graduation? With a doctorate and highly specialized training? \$34,000 working 50 hours per week as a resident. **And I was a lucky one.** Most naturopathic doctors after graduation make less than this during their first year of practice and MUST utilize state assistance (food, medical, etc.) to make it by through to their second year.

I suspect you'll hear many comparisons between naturopathic medical school and that which MD's or DO's graduate from, but what of Physician Assistants and Nurse Practitioners? Naturopathic medical education matches or exceeds both PA and NP programs in didactic, clinical, and post-doctorate education. **Yet, because of disparities, discrimination, and misconceptions regarding our practices, our job opportunities are a fraction of what are available to MDs, DOs, PAs, and NPs** in part due to poor reimbursement and payment for our services.

So why do this in the first place?

You see, my clinic is a Primary Care Home. I see patients from every walk of life and any given day I'm discussing naturopathic therapies, diet and lifestyle changes, medication management, managing psychiatric and pain medications or reviewing supplements. I'm a designated primary care provider for Medicaid patients as well as specialist for those with private insurance. **People come to naturopathic doctors because we take time to get to know them, show interest in their care, can get to the root of their problem, and have far more variety in treatment possibilities.** Patients tend to trust naturopathic doctors more because we are able to take more time with them and discuss more than medication. **On average, naturopathic doctors spend a minimum of 30 minutes at a follow up with their patients.** And yet, **I'm paid 50% less than my peers** who have less clinical and less post-doctorate education or experience.

While I like what I do, this job is hard, and not for the faint-hearted. Without pay parity I am forced to work 60-80 hours per week to manage a 20-hour patient week. Because without pay parity I cannot afford the help I need.

**I want to highlight this: paying naturopathic doctors what they're worth means more jobs.** If you're for jobs, then you are for pay parity. When we're paid more, we're able to hire more help. This means more opportunities for receptionists, medical assistants, billers, phlebotomists, and other allied health providers. **Pay parity means more money to hire naturopathic doctors to fill a growing need for primary care and acute care providers.** Unfortunately, until there is financial benefit for a healthcare system or business to hire an ND, there is no interest. This means patients lose out on highly trained providers who discuss preventative treatments and who, in the long run, could cost the overburdened healthcare system less! It means naturopathic doctors could work in the public sector in county, state, and jails and not be seen as a burden to the bottom line.

Less Talk, More Numbers.

Reimbursement from insurance companies is one (if not THE) most frustrating things about being a naturopathic provider. **For a 30-minute appointment I have been reimbursed \$4. FOUR DOLLARS.** That's \$8 an hour! **I made less than minimum wage! It's unacceptable. Once, a physician in our office was reimbursed \$0.23 for a 15-minute appointment.** Though these are the extremes of the disparity, unfortunately, **disastrously low reimbursement rates are common despite**

**performing equal work and time to that of a family medicine MD, DO, PA, or Nurse practitioner.** You may think, well, *just bill the patient for the remainder of the fee.* Well, a few years ago, Oregon passed a law that forbids balance billing. This was a good move to protect patients. For myself and my family, I'm grateful for this. Unfortunately, as a provider and for those of us billing ethically, it meant being paid significantly less for our services.

In Summary,

A vote for pay parity for naturopathic doctors means:

- **More jobs**
- Sustainable medical care
- Equal pay for equal work (and then some!)
- **Equal pay for equally trained providers**
- **Filling a growing need for trained primary care providers**
- You care about patient centered, whole-person medical care
- You care about focusing on preventative medicine
- **Expanding the possibility for career providers in the areas of county, state, and prison systems**

I am asking that you vote yes on HB2673 and support fair pay for Naturopathic Doctors, our employees, and our families.

Sincerely and thank you for your support,

Stephanie Culver, ND

Category	Naturopathic Doctor (ND)	Nurse Practitioner (NP)	Physician Assistant (PA)	Physician (MD)
<b>Time in Classroom</b>	2 years	500 hrs	1000 hrs	2 years
<b>Time in Clinic</b>	3 years	500-700 hrs	2000 hrs	2 years
<b>Total Post High School Education</b>	8 years	6-8 years	6-7 years	8 years
<b>Residency</b>	Optional 1-3 years	Optional 1-2 years	Optional 1-2 years	3-8 years
<b>Recertification</b>	32 education hours per year (Oregon)	1000 professional practice hours and 12 CE credits per year OR exam every 5 years	100 education hours every 2 years and exam every 10 years	MD: 50 education hours/year and ABMS certification recommended
<b>Average time spent with patients</b>	30 minutes – 1 hour	15 minutes	10-15 minutes	7-15 minutes
<b>Base Salary U.S</b>	<b>\$70,000</b>	\$110,930	\$104,860	\$208,000