



Protecting Healthcare Quality, Access and Choice of Providers

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Coalition for Patients' Rights™ Identifies Key Issues That Impede Patient Care

WASHINGTON – Patients who want healthcare services face barriers in accessing the provider of their choice. The Coalition for Patients' Rights, a national coalition that represents more than three million licensed and certified healthcare professionals, has tracked a number of examples where legal or regulatory requirements impede patients from seeing a full spectrum of healthcare providers.

“A piece of legislation or regulatory requirement may seem like it is designed to protect patients, but in a real-world setting, it may prevent patients from getting the care they need,” said Karen Howard, a spokesperson for the Coalition. This year alone, the National Conference of State Legislatures has tracked more than 950 pieces of legislation affecting healthcare providers' ability to practice, often called “scope of practice.”

The Coalition is monitoring many examples, including:

- **Psychologists' ability to prescribe** – For years, psychologists with additional training in psychopharmacology have been prescribing psychotropic medications in the Department of Defense, Indian Health Service, Public Health Service, New Mexico and Louisiana. Medical institutions like the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association, however, continue to oppose psychologists' right to prescribe in states like Oregon, Hawaii and Montana. Restricting access to treatment in areas affected by a shortage of psychiatrists reduces the ease with which care can be coordinated for people in need of mental health treatment. Patients also have to schedule appointments with two professionals instead of one. Psychologists credentialed to prescribe can reduce or better manage medication for their patients, in addition to offering psychological testing, psychotherapy and other evidence-based interventions.
- **Insurance coverage for naturopathic care** – Patients seeking a naturopathic physician's care may incur unnecessary out-of-pocket expenses because most insurance companies do not cover the cost of a visit. This is despite the fact that naturopathic physicians are trained as primary care providers to use diet, exercise, lifestyle changes and natural therapies to prevent and manage chronic diseases. Several states, including Oregon, Hawaii and New Hampshire, are considering legislation to require insurers to cover services provided in naturopathic physicians' legal capacity as primary care providers. Naturopathic physicians complete four-year undergraduate pre-med programs and are trained in medical schools, just like doctors of medicine.
- **Nurse-Midwives' ability to practice in Maryland** – Expectant mothers who would like a nurse-midwife to deliver their baby may face hurdles due to operational regulations. For example, in Maryland, the state recently passed guidelines requiring certified midwives to submit “Collaborative Plans” to a

committee, which uses the information to recommend midwives receive approval to practice from the Board of Nursing. However, the layer of bureaucratic process has proven cumbersome and demonstrates how patient access can be limited in subtle ways.

“Giving healthcare professionals the ability to treat patients to the full extent of their abilities, education, qualifications and licensure will benefit consumers and patients by giving them access to high-quality, cost effective care,” said Howard. “There are too many challenges in our healthcare system already. We cannot allow qualified healthcare professionals to be underutilized. Smart legislation and regulation will facilitate safety, quality and access.”

For patients who are concerned about the ability to access the care provider of their choice, the Coalition has developed resources for consumers to make their voices heard on these issues. The Coalition’s Consumer Toolkit includes template letters to legislators and insurers to help these critical audiences understand the importance of access to care. These resources are available at <http://www.patientsrightscoalition.org/Patient-Resources.aspx>.

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About the Coalition for Patients’ Rights™

A national coalition of more than 35 organizations, the Coalition for Patients’ Rights represents more than three million licensed and certified healthcare professionals committed to ensuring comprehensive healthcare choices for all patients. It was formed in 2006 in response to divisive efforts by the Scope of Practice Partnership (SOPP), an alliance of medical and osteopathic physician organizations including the American Medical Association (AMA), which aims to limit the scopes of practice of other healthcare professionals.

The Coalition is comprised of a diverse array of healthcare professionals, including registered nurses, naturopathic doctors, psychologists, audiologists, physical and occupational therapists, advanced practice registered nurses (certified registered nurse anesthetists, nurse practitioners, certified nurse-midwives and clinical nurse specialists), foot and ankle surgeons and chiropractors. A full list of members is available on the Coalition’s website: www.patientsrightscoalition.org.