

Testimony Senate Bill 2274- IN OPPOSITION
Human Services Committee
Sixty-seventy Legislative Assembly of North Dakota
March 23, 2021

Greetings Chairman Weisz, Vice Chair Rohr, and House Human Services Committee,

My name is Joan Connell. As a pediatrician as well as a clinical professor of Pediatrics, and based on many personal experiences, I am urging a DO-NOT-PASS vote on SB 2274. I think that the issue of lack of insurance coverage for naturopaths and the prescriptions they may write, that will result in horrific out-of-pocket-costs should end this discussion. However, I am sure others will gloss over this essential fact and provide testimony regarding differences in curriculum and training. These objective differences are important to consider as the legislature works to discern the true “floor” of qualifications for people/groups who have less training but desire the privilege of prescriptive authority and other components of a physician’s scope of practice. I would imagine that you balance this “floor” and its associated risk of negligence and poor patient outcomes against the need to increase access to medical care in our state, which is in part achieved by providers working at the full scope of their practice. Many times in my career I have heard and experienced the reality of this statement:

The more you know, the more you understand all that you do not know.

This is the pitfall of many of these requests made by providers with less training in traditional medicine... because of their limited scope of knowledge in traditional medicine, they do not understand what they do not know. The remainder of my testimony will illustrate this fact with a few cases that have affected me personally, keeping in mind that in all cases, I am sure the naturopath provider, who I am also sure is well trained in naturopathy and had the best intentions of providing the best patient care, was simply unaware of the consequences of their lack of knowledge.

Case 1: A mom of a baby I was caring for came in for their 6 month well check. The baby had become gassy after the 4 month well check and Mom was concerned that formula was the cause. Because of the dietary concern, she sought care from a local naturopath, who recommended a change from infant formula to goat’s milk. Luckily, this change in diet occurred two weeks prior to the 6 month well check. When Mom advised me of this change in nutrition, I was able to counsel her that goat’s milk does not provide adequate infant nutrition and can be dangerous for babies. While I think she struggled over which provider to believe, she did change back to formula. A few weeks later, a baby somewhere else in the United States died from his/her goat milk diet. Lucky...

Case 2: I was caring for a toddler suffering from retention constipation, for which I prescribed Miralax, a nonaddictive safe medicine that softens stool. It is a giant sugar molecule that stays in the gut and draws a lot of water around it, thereby liquifying the surrounding stool. I was unaware of this at the time, but the toddler’s Mom was concerned about using this medication long term, so sought care from a local naturopath, who prescribed high dose vitamin C. Luckily, shortly after this change in therapy, I happened to call the Mom to follow up on how the Miralax. I state that this was lucky because I learned about the change in treatment. I also learned that the dose of Vitamin C recommended by the naturopath for this toddler would

have resulted in severe kidney stones. (I would have thought that a naturopath would have better command of the side effect profile of a vitamin...) Because of that spontaneous phone call, I was able to counsel Mom accordingly, switch therapy back to the safer medication prior to any damage. Lucky...

Case 3: This is a story about my sister-in-law, Lois. While living in Arizona, a state where naturopaths have full prescriptive authority, Lois was diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. Under the impression that naturopaths could provide the same treatments as physicians, Lois-my natural health minded sister-in-law, who changed careers from an interior designer to a physical therapist (in her 50s!), sought care from a naturopath. Lois died 15 months after her diagnosis, months earlier than expected. Two months before she died, Herceptin, a monoclonal antibody therapy that was effective against her cancer, was started by a physician who cared for her while she was hospitalized because of inability to walk and insurmountable pain from cancer that had invaded her back. The naturopath who had treated Lois up to that point had utilized herbal and diet-based treatments, but had never mentioned Herceptin, nor mentioned that it would likely extend Lois's life. I am certain this naturopath was doing his/her best. I am sure this naturopath was simply... unaware... Unfortunately, by the time the medication was started by the physician, it was too late. Unlucky...

You see, Chairman Weisz, Vice Chair Rohr, and House Human Services Committee members, it is easy to check off the box of completing a pharmacology class and feel empowered with the significant increase in knowledge one has gained. And given a fair amount of luck, and the resilience of the human body, those eager-but-lesser-trained-practitioners can many times get through suboptimal treatment recommendations without ever knowing about the significant risk of poor patient outcome due to suboptimal/incorrect/absent recommendations. Yet there is so very much more to the privilege and responsibility of the practice of medicine, including the privilege and responsibility of prescriptive authority. People put their lives in the hands of those deemed worthy by you, the legislature, to provide medical care. I urge you to take this responsibility seriously. I urge you to work fervently to support increasing access to QUALITY care for all North Dakotans. Clearly, passage of Senate Bill 2274 would move us further from that goal. As always, do not hesitate to contact me via this email address with any questions/comments you may have.