

Testimony for: **SENATE BILL NO. 2274**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Steve Irsfeld. I am a pharmacist and pharmacy owner from Dickinson. I currently sit on the ND state board of pharmacy however I am representing myself at this hearing.

In today's conventional practice model where office visits seem to get shorter year after year, often times patients get treatment to help relieve their current symptoms but not always information on treating the underlying cause. Take for instance a patient being treated for pain. By the time the patients come to me with their prescription they are often frustrated and defeated. They are looking for someone who will spend the time helping them to find out the cause of their pain rather than covering up the pain. Most times this takes an integrative approach including diet, general exercise, nutritional supplements, evaluating environmental factors and other treatments. I feel that naturopaths fill a void for patients who need this type of care to be healthy and don't feel that the conventional avenues are helping them.

I know this from personal experience as well. My wife is one of these patients. She was suffering from increasingly debilitating pain and headaches and was just not getting any relief. It just kept getting worse to the point that her quality of life was severely suffering. This was not only hard on our family but also the community that she had no choice but to pull back from. We sought help through the regular channels but, frankly, it was difficult to get anyone to look at her symptoms as a whole and not just treat each one separately. It wasn't until with God's grace we found an MD trained in integrative medicine. He was willing to take the time that was needed to figure out a very frustrating puzzle. We started on a new path that involved all of the channels mentioned above: exercise, physical therapy, massage therapy, chiropractic care, very specific dietary changes, nutritionals, and, yes, some prescription medications (none of which are controlled substance pain killers). Today she is 80% improved and feeling great.

Not only did this change our personal life, it changed the mission of my work. In 2006, I felt a need in the community to help patients with their nutritional supplements. We were receiving many questions about how supplements would work with their existing medications. We wanted to make sure our patients were taking appropriate supplements at appropriate doses and that they did not interact with their existing medications. This led me to joining the American Academy of Anti-Aging and Functional Medicine, an organization that provides education on functional medicine and the use of nutritional supplements as a way to address medical conditions. It was at these meetings that I came in contact with like-minded physicians, naturopaths, nurse practitioners and physician assistants, gaining knowledge on different ways to help our patients.

We are continually having patients ask us if we know of any integrative medical providers, allowing naturopaths prescriptive authority will bring more practitioners to the state which in turn will provide more access for patients looking for alternatives to conventional treatment. Some large healthcare systems like the Cleveland Clinic are embracing integrative medicine by giving it its own department. I believe this is a sign of the times.

In my practice, we are able to provide patients with custom compounded medications. When we have patients with difficult medication problems, we work closely with the patient and practitioner to find solutions. We refer to this as the triad of care: the patient, practitioner and pharmacist working together for a common goal. I find it odd that we are legally able to fill prescriptions from naturopathic doctors from another state who we don't have a working relationship with but not from the practitioner down the street from us.

I am here to testify because I saw first hand that there are times when an integrative approach is not only the best way but the only way to solve some health issues. This occurred prior to naturopaths being recognized in the state of ND. Many times through our journey when we were trying to manage the ins and outs of my wife's care we often felt sad for those who didn't have anyone with a medical background to advocate for them. No one was gathering the pieces and managing the care (including the prescriptions similar to the ones naturopaths will have the ability to prescribe if this bill passes). Unfortunately not all patients have a pharmacist or other health professional living with them to navigate the healthcare maze. In my wife's case with this situation a naturopathic doctor with prescribing rights would have been extremely valuable. In the next situation that may not be the case at all, but this time it was and we didn't have access to it, and for those times, for those patients, it should be available.

It is obvious that conventional medicine is the backbone to our nations healthcare but not all patients respond to its treatments. Having options for patients is something the legislature realized in the last assembly by recognizing naturopaths as a profession. Giving them the tools necessary to treat their patients only makes sense. I ask you to consider a do pass vote coming out of committee.

Lastly, I would please ask that, before denying them the prescribing rights as their counterparts in conventional medicine would like to see, that you ask yourself: Is it really because they are less-qualified or is it because they are not as like-minded? There is a big difference.