

Dana Owen

From: Jill Jefson <jjefson@gci.net>
Sent: Tuesday, April 03, 2012 9:40 PM
To: Dana Owen
Subject: Testimony regarding SB 166 - hearing 4/4/12

Dear Mr. Owen,

Please forward my testimony to the Labor and Commerce committee in time for the public hearing scheduled for Thursday 4/4/12 at 1:30 PM.

I am writing to thank you for hosting a public hearing on the AK Senate Bill (SB 166) regarding licensure of laboratory professionals. I am a medical lab scientist and work at Providence Hospital. I agree with many of my co-workers that licensure is an important part of safe health care for the public. Licensure has long been an expectation of the community for their physicians and their nurses. Laboratory professionals are key to public safety as we provide over 70% of the factual data needed to diagnose and treat individuals. We are often thought of as "only the person that draws my blood" but we are much, much more than that. We are the ones analyzing that blood for thousands of different tests your doctor has ordered. Without my expertise and training the quality of your lab results are only numbers. Day in and day out, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, the hospital laboratory is staffed to ensure that everyone needing a lab test gets the quality they deserve so your physician can make sound medical decisions.

Fortunately, Providence is very strict about who we hire as laboratory professionals and require all of our lab techs to hold laboratory certifications, but that is not true of all organizations. The Federal government tried to ensure quality test results with the implementation of the Clinical Laboratory Improvements Amendments (CLIA) enacted in the early 1990s. That legislation stemmed from poor quality Pap smear results that resulted in patient deaths. The problem is that law was severely "watered down" due to pressure from many different lobbying groups. It allows for individuals with high school diplomas and no certification to result your laboratory tests with minimal oversight and training. The laboratory professional of today requires considerable training to ensure that testing is done accurately and quickly. I personally have a bachelor's degree with 2 years of post-graduate work. Even the person that draws your blood needs training and education to know how to safely obtain your blood sample. Ask any lab professional and they will tell you that no matter how well we perform the actual lab test, if the sample isn't collected properly the results of the test may not be accurate.

Certification with a requirement for continuing education is paramount to getting quality lab tests. Medical advancements happen so quickly now, that we need to be constantly reading and learning. I fully support licensure for the laboratory professionals in Alaska. The laboratory community is generally a very quiet, and introverted group of people. We do like the routine of the laboratory and are reluctant to "toot our own horns", but it is time the community at large recognize the importance of what we do and demand fully qualified, certified and licensed individuals perform their lab tests.

I support the intent of the bill to use national certification agencies to manage the certification process for individual lab professionals. Many opponents of this bill think we have enough qualified individuals working in the laboratory and that we don't need the "government" getting involved, costing everyone more money. The way the bill is written, I don't think it will create that much of a hardship or cost to the State and review board. Allowances have been made for traveling lab professionals to forgo getting licensed if they are in the state for only one 13-week assignment. New certification requirements have been in place since 2004, and require all lab professionals certified after 2004 provide evidence of continuing education (CE) to renew their certification. The board would use this same continuing education requirement for all individuals. Some lab professionals certified prior to that date do not need to provide evidence of CE to their certification board. To retain their certification and licensure under this bill, they would need to submit

evidence of CE by upgrading their certification, but it would be managed by the certification agency. This allows older techs to be grandfathered into the new legislation. I think this is very important. As I have said, technology changes so fast that we need to keep up to date with what is going on in our field. The bill allows individuals to be grandfathered in so all currently employed lab professionals will not lose their jobs, but can be licensed.

It all comes down to quality of care and ensuring public safety. Because the lab is so critical to a patient's diagnosis and on-going care, I can't imagine not having fully-competent, certified and LICENSED laboratory professionals at the heart of those results. Even Point of Care testing should be overseen. These tests that were defined by the FDA as requiring minimal training to perform are done incorrectly. I was at the State Conference for the Clinical Laboratory Scientists of Alaska last week and heard Fran Lehr, Regional Inspector for the CLIA program in the NW, say that when she inspects CLIA waived laboratories in physician offices, they often do not follow the manufacturer's instructions, and thereby compromise the quality of those results. Even something as easy a urine test can be performed incorrectly. If the urine sample is not at room temperature, i.e. cold, when tested, the chemistry pads will not react appropriately. If the test pads are not read at the appropriate time as indicated on the strip, results can be wrong; missing a diagnosis of infection, hematuria, diabetes, kidney disease, or liver disease. Untreated disease in the kidneys can lead to serious complications including kidney failure, which ultimately costs the patient and their insurance companies significant money. The provision in the bill for oversight of the point of care testing program may be the most hotly contested part of this bill. I foresee many entrepreneurial laboratory technologists becoming consultants to meet this need for oversight. It doesn't require daily oversight, or even weekly oversight. It does require individuals performing these tests get training and have a method to ensure their competency on at least an annual basis. Again, I think this is a good thing.

Physicians depend on quality lab results to make sound decisions, the quality that certified lab professionals provide. The State of Alaska should make this a priority for public safety and add licensing of laboratory professionals to the law.

Should you have questions, please don't hesitate to contact me. My cell phone number is 907-242-3290.

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