

February 6, 2017

Senator David Wilson
Chair of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Senate Bill 32 (Hughes) - Support

Dear Senator Wilson,

The Arthritis Foundation urges the members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee to support Senate Bill 32. This important bill will update current law and allow the substitution of biologic medicines with interchangeable biological products. This bill would also require a pharmacist, when dispensing an interchangeable biological product, to communicate the change to both the patient and the prescriber.

Arthritis is an umbrella term for more than 100 different conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, ankylosing spondylitis that affects the spine, and uveitis that affects the eye and can lead to permanent vision loss. For more than 117,000 Alaskans suffering from this debilitating disease, ensuring they have access to life-changing medications is vital. In many cases that means the difference between a lifetime of disability and full participation in work and civic life. In addition to the ongoing management of a patient's arthritis, of which there is no cure, the vast majority of patients with arthritis also have multiple other chronic conditions. Because of the complexity to not only treat rheumatic conditions, but also the patient's comorbidities, it is imperative the patient and their physician are able to discuss their treatment options, changes with medications, as well as options available to them. Senate Bill 32 takes a step in the right direction to ensure the both the patient and the physician are notified and will encourage a high level of communication between all players on the healthcare team.

When therapeutic innovations come to market, patient safety must remain the number one priority in any discussion; even if a drug is less expensive, these advantages mean nothing if the drug does not successfully treat the patient. It is important to remember that these are complex medications, and that interchangeable biological products are not the same as generics. Because of this, the Arthritis Foundation is committed to ensuring that the concerns of people who take these medications, and the specialist physicians who treat them, are kept at the forefront. By doing so, the patient and physician can continue a dialogue ensuring they receive the optimal care with these game-changing medicines.

On behalf of the Arthritis Foundation, I thank you for your consideration and urge your support of SB 32 which will keep patients and providers informed when medications are substituted.

Sincerely,



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