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STATE OF ALASKA
DEPARTMENT OF
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COMMUNITY AND
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Division of Corporations, Business and Professional Licensing

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1 March 2010

The Honorable Sean Parnell
Governor of Alaska
Post Office Box 110001
Juneau AK 99811-0001

Governor Parnell, the Alaska State Medical Board urges you and your colleagues in the legislature to defeat House Bill 282 that creates a "naturopathic medical board" and gives certain rights and recognitions to naturopaths in Alaska.

In a recent Alaska State Medical Board meeting, board members were unanimous in their strong opposition to the proposed legislation for a variety of reasons.

The principles of naturopathy are based on the belief that the body is self-healing, that the patient's "vital force" is restored by ridding the body of "toxins." As scientists, we find this simplistic approach to human ailments to be in direct conflict with the science-based knowledge of body physiology and pathology as taught to medical physicians (M.D.s) and osteopathic physicians (D.O.s). The danger of this approach is that patients with serious diseases will rely solely on the treatments provided by practitioners of naturopathy ignoring the treatments proven to be safe and effective by a science-based medical physician. All forms of naturopathic education include concepts incompatible with basic science, and do not necessarily prepare a practitioner to make appropriate diagnosis or referrals.

In 1968, in a report entitled "Independent Practitioners under Medicare," the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare concluded:

"Naturopathic theory and practice are not based on the body of basic knowledge related to health, disease, and health care which has been widely accepted by the scientific community. Moreover, irrespective of its theory, the scope and quality of naturopathic education do not prepare the practitioner to make an adequate diagnosis and provide appropriate treatment."

Doctors of naturopathy, unlike medical and osteopathic physicians, are not required to obtain a minimum level of education that includes a bachelor's degree before entering into school to become a naturopath. There is little requirement for pharmaceutical education beyond the "natural" products typically used by naturopaths. There is little to no training to perform surgical procedures. And yet, naturopaths want to be allowed to perform surgical procedures and to prescribe medications for which they have received little or no education or training.

In a paper entitled "Naturopathy: A Monograph," Kimball C. Atwood, MD, Massachusetts Medical Society for the Massachusetts Special Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medical Practitioners, April, 2001, wrote:

"Licensure offers regulation to protect the public. Regulators must hold health professions to a very high standard, since considerable damage can occur as a result of treatment by incompetent practitioners. To be considered a *health* profession, an occupation must be able to demonstrate an objective, scientific, and ethical basis. Naturopathy fails to meet this standard."

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We are also very concerned with doctors of naturopathy being allowed to call themselves "physician." The title of physician has been historically reserved for medical doctors and osteopathic doctors. To permit others to use the title will serve only to confuse the public into thinking they are receiving care from someone whose education equals that of a medical or osteopathic doctor. We urge you to reject this attempt to grant greater recognition to the practitioner of naturopathy profession that it is due. The public will not be served.

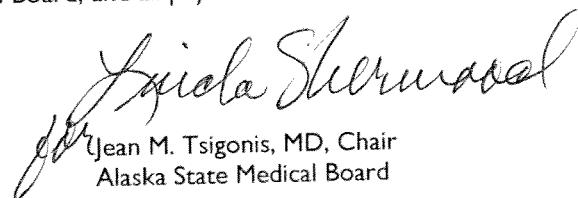
As the regulatory body entrusted with the responsibility for the licensure and discipline of physicians in our state, it is our opinion that the education and training attained by those who practice naturopathy does not prepare them adequately in modern pharmacology nor are they sufficiently trained and skilled to perform surgical procedures. Contrast the four-year education received by the naturopath consisting of two years of didactic training and two years of clinical training against the typically eight to twelve years of education and training received by allopathic and osteopathic physicians.

While some would give the impression that naturopathy is a widely accepted and approved form of health care, only 20 states license naturopaths in this country. Many of those 20 states do not permit naturopaths to prescribe controlled substances or perform surgeries.

Naturopaths are currently licensed in Alaska. They are regulated but there is no formal, appointed board that provides oversight. With the predominance of remote practice and the lack of on-site supervision or support, it would not serve the Alaskan public well to be in the lead for states to expand the scope of practice for other health care practitioners. In fact, the board believes that the safety of our patients would be at risk.

In the best interests of our patients, we urge you, Governor Parnell, and our legislators, to defeat these bills.

On behalf of the members of the Alaska State Medical Board, and all physicians in the state, thank you, sir, for your support.



Jean M. Tsigonis, MD, Chair
Alaska State Medical Board

xc: Members, Alaska State Senate
Members, Alaska State House of Representatives