

**Dr. Rob Downey, MD**

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Testimony in Favor of HB115 – March 25, 2023

Hi, thanks for your time. I'm Rob Downey, a family practice MD, and Institute for Functional Medicine certified practitioner. I work for South Central Hospital in Homer, Alaska. I am dual certified in that I'm board certified in family medicine, and I also am certified in functional medicine through the Institute for Functional Medicine. The Institute for Functional Medicine Training is recognized by the American Medical Academy for the highest level of recognition for continuing medical education for physicians like myself. It is certainly a very similar approach to naturopathic medicine, in no small part due to the father of functional medicine, Doctor Jeffrey Bland, who was mentored by the Nobel laureate Linus Pauling, both founding the Institute for Functional Medicine 30 plus years ago and Bastyr University along with Doctor Joseph Pizzorno in the Pacific Northwest.

So, I have had a unique opportunity to live in both worlds, which I think physicians may well have the privilege to talk with all of you today about some very specific aspects I can share about the power and safety of naturopathic medicine and why I'm an advocate, very strong advocate, for this bill to be passed.

Starting in 2006, my practice in Montana in a rural healthcare clinic, I met Doctor Hillary Daily, a naturopathic doctor trained at Bastyr and a case of autoimmunity that did not respond well to conventional medicine. A woman who was disabled with psoriatic arthritis, responded spectacularly well to stress management, whole food probiotics, and the tactical anti-inflammatory Boswellia and curcumin.

At that time, I asked Doctor Daily how I could have similar results with my patients. She encouraged me to get trained by the Institute for Functional Medicine and based on a similar model at cancer treatment Centers of America, Doctor Daily and I endeavored together to see patients together at the point of care every Wednesday, which we did from 2006 all the way up to 2014, after she came up to Alaska for a few years so we could keep practicing together here at Seldovia Village Tribe Health and Wellness where I was the medical director from 2012 to 2014.

During that period, I met Doctor Abby Lang in 2012, who I share patients with to the present. I should note that both of these two individuals, these brilliant, caring, dynamic female providers, have not only won my respect, but they're my clinical heroes. Both of them solve challenging cases which are beyond even the powers I've accumulated as a dual trained provider. I should note that I think that naturopathic doctors are heroes who are well trained and perfectly positioned to meet an absolutely critical, crux problem of primary care here in Alaska.

Naturopathic doctors are very well trained in the use of pharmacologic agents and the equivalents to MD training and the use of drugs and prescribing has already been well elaborated today. If this bill goes through, which I strongly believe it should, it won't

endanger patients and it will be safe. I also think this change in Alaska, and around the rest of the United States is inevitable, and I think of it more as when, not if. The reason I say that is because of my experience.

Over 17 years working literally in the same rooms with naturopathic doctors, making decisions with them, in shared collaborative settings, I am absolutely convinced that reservations that happened around the time of states making these changes will go by the wayside. In retrospect, and in addition, those states will be very satisfied to see that good things are happening for everyone. The rare win-win solutions so many of us are eager for, and this time we live in. This bill will allow naturopathic doctors to work to their level of training.

Anyone who's concerned that naturopathic doctors may be like that teenager that then turns 21 and when they first have access to liquor will somehow be out of control or inappropriate probably may not be aware of the fact that naturopathic doctors by temperament do tend to use medications as a last resort. But this is also really important time to make the distinction. the naturopathic doctors I have worked with and also the many, many NDs that I work with naturopathic doctors, through collaboration, networking around the country, etcetera, educational settings, these folks fundamentally have the same judgment I do. By that I mean they know when somebody's blood pressure is 200 over 110, that person needs an immediate care; that person needs to go to the emergency department. If there's going to be a one-hour lag between when they're treated and when they get to the emergency department, they need to be prescribed clonidine to bring down their blood pressure immediately.

If somebody has a decreased O2 SAT, or oxygen saturation, there's crackles in their lungs via the stethoscope, and they appear to have labored breathing, they need an antibiotic. Naturopathic doctors don't proceed stepwise through stress management and a whole food recommendation for somebody with bacterial pneumonia. So, in that respect there's really no difference in clinical judgment whatsoever based on my experience.

I'm just so deeply concerned that consideration about getting this bill passed not be theoretical. I see in my real-world practice day-to-day that if we don't have the person with the training being able to deliver the prescription at the time of care, any secondary measures fall short. The theoretical that there could be some sort of collaboration, where the medical doctor (MD) or a PA or a nurse practitioner (NP) is contacted to prescribe, basically adds an extra link of communication on the chain. There is extensive data from the world of aviation, mountaineering and medicine that the more steps there are in the chain, the worst the outcomes are. So, it I think in Alaska, if we want to get really serious about getting this primary care shortage met and delivering safe care, we should go right at the heart of it and get these excellent naturopathic doctors the prescribing privileges they've earned and which they're prepared to use on behalf of all of us. Thank you for the privilege of getting to talk to you today.