January 31, 2007

Public Hearing

Pubic Health Committee

My name is Sharon Gauthier and I am a registered nurse. I am here today in support of the proposed Bills HB 6842 An Act Appropriating Funds for Patient Navigation, HB 6332 An Act Increasing Access to Health Care

First let me speak on Bill 6842 An Act Appropriating Funds for Patient Navigation. Presently our healthcare system is difficult for the most seasoned, educated health care professional to navigate. Our patients are often left alone to pilot this system when they are most compromised and vulnerable.

I could share many personal and professional stories concerning our present system of health care delivery but instead I would like to talk to you all about the present role of nursing. The current healthcare delivery system utilizes nurses as collectors of data, medication administrators and computer experts. Many nurses have left the bedside because of these changes and are no longer caring for our sickest patients.

Nurses should be frontline case managers in the health care delivery system, the navigators of our healthcare system. Nurses need to be available to advocate for the patient. Patients must have available resources and professional assistance for follow up, education and medication management. Patients need a professional nurse who will take the time to talk with them, understands them, acknowledge their needs and coordinate their care. Nurses are in a position to provide this care and case management. It is essential that all patients have at least one person who will advocate, coordinate care and collaborate with appropriate health professionals. This is the standard and not the exception.

The public continues to trust that our healthcare delivery system, the providers of health care, nurses and physicians, will practice in a way that will provide support, information, education, coordination and collaboration regarding all the patients' healthcare needs.

We cannot ignore that there is a nursing shortage, but I ask you all, what have we done about this? There has been a red alert about this shortage for a long time yet we choose to ignore it and continue to collect information, data and reports but little action.

Invest in a structure that supports the role of nursing to achieve a system that will include the adequate management and coordination, the right education the right support for patients who enter our healthcare system. A registered nurse patient advocate role is one of the roles of nursing. Patients' are entitled to have someone who watches over their care, someone who can address their needs and support them at a time they require support the most.

Last I would like to talk about **Bill #6332 An Act Increasing Access to Healthcare:** Anything and I mean anything that anyone does this session to increase access to healthcare would be an improvement. At this moment the only alternative to access, in the minds of most uninsured is the emergency room. Although we know there may be alternatives to the emergency room, the patient doesn't know there are alternatives. I would suggest since the emergency departments have become the stop gap to access, that they are part of the solution. I say this with much experience in an emergency room setting. If there is any place that needs to have a heavy case management team it is in the emergency department. When patients are treated in the emergency department there has to be a system in place that allows patients to gain access to other options for care and with follow up. Without investing in a system that will assist patients with alternatives in the health care delivery systems they will continue to show up in Emergency Departments.

According to the dictionary healthcare is defined as "aimed at providing health, concerned with or involved in providing physical and mental services, preventive medicine and treatment to individuals or the public" (Encarta, 2001)

No where does this definition identify insurance as the driver for caring. As a state and a country we need to invest in what is everyone's right to accessing care at the right time and the right place with the right people for all the people.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about these very important topics that impact all of us.

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