

Testimony of the Connecticut ENT Society  
On  
**Raised Bill 6265, An Act Concerning Speech and Language Pathology**  
Presented to the Public Health Committee  
By  
Scott Schoem, MD

Good Afternoon Senator Harris, Representative Ritter and other distinguished members of this Committee. For the record my name is Dr. Scott Schoem, and I am the Director of Pediatric Otolaryngology at the Connecticut Children's Medical Center in Hartford. I am here as President of the CT ENT Society, representing over 90% of the otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeons practicing in Connecticut, to testify in support of Raised Bill 6265. This bill was raised at the request of our society because we were concerned that the law, as written, may unintentionally lead to speech and language pathologists diagnosing medical conditions, which would place patient safety and quality of care at risk.

Up until a few years ago, we were not aware that this language existed. However, in 2005, an expansion of speech and language pathology's scope of practice was slipped into an implementer bill, which inappropriately added the diagnosis and treatment of swallowing and other upper aerodigestive disorders to their practice. This action caused us to take notice of the law. There were several issues of concern, including speech and language pathology's ability to independently diagnose and treat medical disorders, including those affecting speech, voice, and swallowing. Unfortunately, there was no public hearing or opportunity for dialogue at the time, since the expansion was included in an implementer bill. As you know, there is little time for legislators and the public to digest these lengthy bills before they are voted on by each chamber. Therefore, we appreciate the committee's willingness to re-examine the law and have a meaningful dialogue about its potential impact on patient care.

We do not believe that it was the intent of the Legislature or the sponsoring organization to permit non-physicians to medically diagnose when this law was originally drafted; and we believe this may simply be an issue of clarifying the role of speech and language pathologists in the diagnosis process. By definition, a diagnosis is medical in nature and should only be determined by a medically- or osteopathically-trained physician. In order to develop a diagnosis, a physician performs a full history and physical examination, and may order testing to identify a condition or symptom, or the level of severity of a condition. The results of those tests are then used by the physician to determine the diagnosis.



Otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeons work closely with speech and language pathologists in their day to day practice, and look to them to evaluate conditions related to communications disorders by describing behaviors or using various testing modalities. This is NOT the same as presenting a medical diagnosis. These are simply assessments that contribute to the diagnosis. Speech and language pathologists may then provide therapy services to ameliorate or lessen the effect of such conditions, as ordered by the referring physician. For example, some patients after suffering a stroke have difficulty swallowing. The physician diagnoses the stroke and if the swallowing problem is related to the stroke. Otolaryngologists diagnose if the swallowing issue is due to a change in sensation and/or discoordination of the muscles of swallowing. The speech and language pathologist will observe these effects and recommend strategies to help the patient cope, such as extending the neck when swallowing.

We are concerned that if speech and language pathologists are diagnosing medical conditions, that patients run the risk of being misdiagnosed or inappropriately treated, since speech and language pathologists do not have the medical education and training necessary to properly diagnose, manage, and provide treatment options given their limited training.

In speaking with our speech and language pathology colleagues, they have stated that “diagnosis” must be part of their scope of practice in order to bill for certain diagnostic services. The CT ENT Society would welcome the opportunity to work with our colleagues to revise this law in a way that enables them to perform and bill for speech pathology services, but does not place patient safety or outcomes at risk. Therefore, we ask that you pass House Bill 6265 out of Committee in order to continue it through the process as we work with speech and language pathologists to strengthen the final language.

I am happy to take any questions.

