



Testimony of the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI) Connecticut Oral Health Initiative

to Program Review and Investigations Committee

Concerning Public Hearing on

Hospital Emergency Department Use and Its Impact on State Medicaid Budget

Thursday, September 26, 2013

Senator Kissel, Representative Mushinsky and members on the Program Review and Investigations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak at this hearing.

I am Mary Moran Boudreau, the Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI) Executive Director. COHI is the state's leading oral health advocacy organization, working with other stakeholders across Connecticut to advance "Oral Health for All."

Oral health is a vital part of overall health. Oral health affects people physically and psychologically, influencing the way they grow, how they speak and chew, as well as affecting them in school, work and social settings. Dental conditions generally get progressively worse if not treated, leading to more extensive and costly care.

With the 2008 settlement of the Carr vs. Wilson-Coker lawsuit resulted in a substantial increase to the number of children utilizing the dental services. This was directly due to the increase in reimbursement rates to dentists and more-streamlined administration of benefits, that resulted in an over ten-fold increase in dentists providing services to HUSKY clients. But, we still are seeing children in the Emergency Departments (ED) of our hospitals. Adults, including those who need to pay out of the pocket or find difficulty finding care at the low reimbursement rates from Adult HUSKY, also are using our ED at alarming rates for chronic oral disease that causes pain and inflammation due to dental decay, periodontal disease and oral cancers.

The treatment in the ED usually consist of palliative treatment to relieve the pain with antibiotics which may or may not address the issue and pain medication, which resolves the pain, but not the cause. Many individuals are using the ED for dental disease when it would be better handled in the dental setting.

What is of importance here today is the much higher cost of visiting the ED, than would be incurred by seeing a dentist. Using the ED for dental care is an inappropriate use of resources and leads to a lack of continuity of dental care. A dentist would treat the patient to resolve the condition. This is a better use of resources.

Our request here is to increase the access to oral health care for more individuals in the state. First, through better referral for continuing care when a patient is seen in the ED. Second, to increase the reimbursement rates for HUSKY Adults and Children to increase the ability of patients to be treated in a dental home. Third, if I may wish a big dream, is to have oral health care legislated as an essential health benefit for persons of all ages.

Thank you for your time and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have further questions or concerns. I can be reached at maryb@ctoralhealth.org or at 86+0-246-2644, Ext. 202.

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