

**Statement Before
General Law
Tuesday, February 17, 2015**

**HB 5782 An Act Allowing Pharmacists to Dispense or Administer an
Opioid Antagonist to Treat or Prevent a Drug Overdose**

Good Afternoon Senator Leone, Representative Baram and members of the General Law Committee. My name is Margherita Giuliano and I am both a pharmacist and the Executive Vice President of the Connecticut Pharmacists Association. The Connecticut Pharmacists Association is a professional organization representing 800 pharmacists in the state of Connecticut. I am here today to speak in support of HB 5782 *An Act Allowing Pharmacists to Dispense or Administer an Opioid Antagonist to Treat or Prevent a Drug Overdose*.

This legislation will allow pharmacists to not only dispense naloxone, but also administer naloxone for the treatment of a drug overdose.

As you know, there are a staggering number of opiate-related deaths in our country today. News reports of deaths due to heroin/fentanyl combination have dominated the airwaves. With easy access to heroin and opiate prescription medications it becomes critical that we remove barriers to the availability of naloxone for people at risk for overdose. Pharmacists are in a perfect position to be able to not only identify persons at risk, but to be able to provide the medication and the education to patients or caregivers as to how to administer the medication when needed.

This proposed legislation addresses a very critical public health issue in our communities: the availability of prescription drugs in a medicine cabinet that become easily accessible to family members, young people, and others. In the last few years, the statistics concerning prescription drug abuse, especially among teens, has escalated.

Some drug abuse facts that concern us as pharmacists:

- Two-thirds of teens who abuse pain relievers say they got the pills from family members and friends;
- More Americans die from drug overdoses than in car crashes and this increasing trend is driven by use of prescription painkillers. Connecticut is one of 29 states where this is true.
- 90% of all adults with substance abuse disorders started using under the age of 18 and the other half started using under the age of 15.
- One in nine young people aged 12 to 25 used prescription drugs non-medically within the past year.
- 62% of teens report that their parents have talked to them about drugs and alcohol in the past year. But only 17% of teens say their parents have talked to them about prescription drug abuse.

As a front line health care provider pharmacists not only are in the perfect position to impact these statistics but also have the knowledge and expertise to initiate naloxone therapy for people at risk. Pharmacists routinely see patients with legitimate medical reasons being prescribed large doses of opioids that might unintentionally result in an overdose. The pharmacist should be allowed to initiate a prescription for naloxone and educate the patient on signs and symptoms of overdose as well as the proper administration of naloxone in case of an overdose.

We would suggest that the committee consider amending the proposed language to state: ***"A pharmacist can prescribe, dispense and administer an opioid reversal agent after appropriate certification."*** *The Department of Consumer Protection may promulgate regulations.*

This simple change in language removes many barriers to allowing the pharmacists - a trusted health care provider and medication expert- to use their position in the community as a public health center to responsibly provide access to this life-saving medication when appropriate.

We would also like to take a moment to commend Governor Malloy for his recently unveiled legislative initiative to help curb heroin and prescription opioid abuse through more streamlined prescription reporting, continued education requirements for practitioners, and greater availability of naloxone in case of emergency. Of particular interest to the CPA and its members, is the Governor's belief that in cases of overdose or medical emergency, he supports making naloxone more widely available, and allowing **pharmacists**, after being trained and certified through the Department of Consumer Protection, to prescribe it to Connecticut families, first responders, and the treatment community across the state.

Passing the amended legislation is a solution to breaking down the barriers to naloxone availability so that we can move forward with a strong naloxone program in this state to save persons at risk. We fully support these efforts and are enthusiastic about the role pharmacists will play in this public health initiative.