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Testimony on Senate BILL: 981 An Act Concerning Medical Assistants
Public Health Committee
March 12, 2015

I am Sharon Gauthier RN/MSN/CGM, PAFY ,LLC and I am presenting testimony on Senate BILL: 981 An Act Concerning Medical Assistants

.As a seasoned registered nurse with my own patient care coordination practice I am involved with multiple medical offices. I have several concerns with allowing medical assistants to practice in the role of a registered nurse or licensed practical nurse who is under the direction of a registered nurse and/ or working under the physicianwithout professional direction.

In particular with the population of those who enter an FQHC in Connecticut; this population are extremely vulnerable and often are at a lower economic status than most and are present with cultural challenges as well as being multilingual.

Having worked previously in one of the FQHC (Community Centers) I can report that the amount of patients rotating through these centers are upwards of 30 to 40 patients a day if not more. It is a fast paced environment with little time to understand the issues at hand while managing the sometimes acute, multi system issues of patients being treated. An experienced registered nurse working in this environment is challenged with managing the patient, the assessment and the treatment, education and discharge correctly.

Although my population of clients do not visit FQHC's they are involved with many practices in Connecticut. My experience with medical assistants FQHC'S have been absolutely appalling.

Let me list just a few of the experiences I have had in the last 7 years of being in an advocacy practice.

1. Medical assistants are triaging patients that call into the physician practice. Including specialties like cardiologists, pulmonologists, and orthopedic surgeons. A skill that only the most experienced registered nurse should be performing.

2. Medical assistants are distributing medications including injections, respiratory treatments and giving out sample medications.
3. Medical assistants are calling in prescriptions. I have had 4 instances in just the last year of the wrong medication being ordered that sounded "similar" and would have harmed my clients if taken and if not discovered by either the patient or my staff prior to taking them.
4. Medical assistants are instructing patients on procedures, wound care, calling in supplies specific to particular clinical issues (i.e. wounds) often making errors on what is ordered.
5. Medical assistants are completing procedures in an office (x-ray) without training.
6. Medical assistants are writing erroneous blood pressures when using machines that aren't identified by other staff and medication changes are being made based on those numbers rather than checked by the physician.
7. Medical assistants are putting medications unsupervised into syringes for physician to inject into patients.

Now this list is a limited list of tasks and duties that I have observed in an atmosphere that has NOT given medical assistants the ability to perform any of these tasks. However, my real concern is what other responsibilities they will then take over when we pass this current bill that they shouldn't be taking over because they are not qualified by virtue of education.

The role of the Registered Nurse is clear. The physician practices as well as the FQHC's managing of patients are based on looking at costs and not looking on who is providing the safe, high quality care to their patients.

If we allow this bill to pass I assure you that the training will be limited although documented as done; little supervision will be provided as they move forward and nursing staff will be decreased, if any nurses continue to work in these settings . The role of the medical assistant will expand without the same expansion of education and training. . There will be abuse, as there is significant abuse now. Who will be responsible for this abuse? Who will be accountable? And who will even know??? Most people don't have any idea what is going on in these practices except for those who tell you what they do. I can tell you with experience that .there will be harm.

The practice of nursing requires maturity, education, skill training and support that surpasses any medical assistant program. Medical assistant programs prepare at the basic skill level theory behind the practice is minimal. Many of the tasks performed by Medical assistants require a depth of knowledge the administration of medications by Injection can and will cause harm. Administration of medications by medical assistants will cause harm especially if the patient is not educated related to the medication.

Please do not consider passing this bill that is driven by an obvious agenda to save money and provide safe quality care. It puts patients at risk.

Thank you

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President