

Good Afternoon,

I am Dr. Joel Levine, Professor of Medicine, past Chief of the Division of Gastroenterology and current Founding Director of the Colon Cancer Prevention Program at the Neag Comprehensive Cancer Center at UCONN HEALTH.

in support of

SB 857- AN ACT CONCERNING LICENSURE FOR GENETIC COUNSELORS

February 20, 2015

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, Senator Markley, Representative Srinivasan and members of the Public Health Committee, my name is [Name] and I am here to testify in strong support of Senate Bill 857- An Act Concerning Licensure for Genetic Counselors.

The Colon Cancer Prevention Program has not encountered a colon cancer in 5 years. Our purpose has been to identify risk, see how the risk is expressed in the colon ( colonoscopy ) and put patients on programs that reduce the biologic and life style factors that create colon cancer. There are many identified risk factors that fall into 2 main groups: those that are modifiable and those that are not. In the latter, a family history of colon cancer is associated with almost 25 % of patients. For this group, there is no more important service rendered than by the Genetics Counselors.

Let me explain. When there is a positive family history of colon cancer, the patterns may suggest either familial risk ( wherein the genes related to developing colon cancer are normal at birth ) or inherited risk ( where mutations are passed from parent to child or sometimes from parent to the subsequent generation ( grand children ). For each risk group, the ability to prevent cancer is related to knowing how often to survey such patients and what to offer as specific advice to lower risk. The patterns of risk are increasingly complex and require very detailed family histories, a solid knowledge of academic genetics, an expert knowledge of the meaning and biologic associations of colon polyps ( with many polyps now seen as surrogates for specific molecular pathways ). This has become its own discipline and requires a very high level of expertise. I have been very fortunate at the Colon Cancer Program to have genetics support of the highest order.

There is , however, a most important human element. When the possibility of having generations of cancer ( and often in more than just the colon for germ line mutations are in all cells in the body ), people are frightened. The implications for themselves , children , grand children are profound and life long. This requires both a gentle touch and a capability to engender confidence through expertise. This is as important as the knowledge of science and the standards for training and license should be rigorous. Genetics counseling is far more than reading guidelines and ordering tests. Our Program knows that too well. So many cases are not conforming or need the diligence of Sherlock. Good Counselors understand that and know the import of the slightest detail.

Please understand that my Programs success is largely based on my confidence when i sent patients and families to our Genetics group. A mistake there , or a fact unlearned can ruin many lives.

Joel B. Levine MD  
Professor of Medicine.