

# **HB 1717**

Presented to  
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Professional Licensure Committee

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By  
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Good morning, distinguished members of the House Professional Licensure Committee. My name is Dr. John Laird. I am a graduate of the John Bastyr College of Naturopathic Medicine, now known as Bastyr University. For the past thirteen years, I have been a naturopathic counselor at the Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center-Shadyside Hospital where I am credentialed to provide counseling on nutrition, botanicals, and dietary supplements to both inpatients and outpatients. I am also an associate professor and full-time faculty member in the departments of physician assistant studies and integrative health studies at Chatham University in Pittsburgh. I have been a full-time faculty member at Chatham for the past 14 years. I teach human gross anatomy, physiology, pathophysiology, and basic clinical procedures such as injections, urinary catheterization, phlebotomy, and sterile technique. I have also taught conventional clinical medicine as a facilitator of problem-based learning groups in the physician assistant studies program. Integrative Health Studies is a new major at Chatham which I coordinate, and will teach courses in integrative nutrition, and botanicals and dietary supplements.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 1717 today. Chapter 1, section 102 declares that naturopathic medicine affects the "public health, safety and welfare" of the citizens of Pennsylvania. I will address this fundamental provision of the bill as it pertains to dietary supplements and their interactions with prescription and over-the-counter medications. It is commonly known that the use of dietary supplements is widespread. What are the facts? The 2007 National Health Interview Survey found that 18% of adults took a non-vitamin, non-mineral product in the previous 12 months.<sup>1</sup> A survey of patients at the Mayo Clinic determined that between 32 and 51% of patients seeking care in specialty clinics used dietary supplements.<sup>2</sup> Interviews of community-dwelling adults aged 57-85 years in the National Social Life and Aging project revealed that 52% took at least one dietary supplement concurrently with a prescription medication.<sup>3</sup> That number increased to 74% among the participants in the Ginkgo Evaluation of Memory research trial.<sup>4</sup> Most patients do not inform their physicians of such use. How many? One study found that 69% of patients did not reveal their use of dietary supplements to their conventional health care provider.<sup>5</sup>

Naturopathic doctors are trained in the indications, contraindications, adverse effects, and mechanism of action of dietary supplements. Patients seek out naturopathic doctors for advice on dietary supplements. They bring their bags full of dietary supplements to their consultations with me. I receive referrals from MDs whose patients want to use dietary supplements during their cancer treatment. Physicians and patients are concerned about potential interactions between dietary supplements and prescription drugs. Naturopathic doctors who are graduates from accredited naturopathic medical colleges are trained to identify these. For example, the botanical, St. John's wort has the potential to interact with 50% of prescription medications.

Goldenseal may increase the side effects of statins such as Zocor, Lipitor and Crestor, macrolide antibiotics such as erythromycin, and certain antidepressants such as Prozac and Paxil.<sup>6,7,8</sup> Ginkgo may interfere with the effectiveness of Prilosec which is used to treat acid reflux disease.<sup>9</sup> Glucosamine has been reported to potentiate the blood thinning effects of the commonly prescribed drug, warfarin.<sup>10</sup> Unqualified naturopaths who receive their degrees from correspondence schools lack the training to recognize such interactions with prescription medications. Patients ask for advice about the quality of dietary supplements, Naturopathic doctors have the expertise to advise on the safety and quality of dietary supplements. NDs know that 20% of ayurvedic herbal patent medicines bought through the internet are contaminated with high levels of lead, mercury and/or arsenic.<sup>11</sup> Only 10% of non-prescription prenatal vitamins have the same amount of iodine in the capsule or pill as claimed on the label.<sup>12</sup> Naturopathic doctors are aware that dietary supplements that are produced with "good manufacturing practices" are labeled with the logos of the United States Pharmacopeia, National Sanitation Foundation or the Natural Products Association attesting to their independent audit.

Patients are concerned about the effectiveness of dietary supplements in the treatment of their health disorders. Naturopathic doctors are trained to assess the efficacy of dietary supplements according to the standards of evidence-based medicine. The results of randomized controlled clinical trials, both positive and negative are frequently published in the major medical journals, and guide our practice. For example, supplementation with selenium was found to improve the quality of life and slow the progression of disease in the eyes of people with Graves' disease which is the most common cause of hyperthyroidism in the United States.<sup>13</sup> A combination of vitamin D and calcium taken for four years reduced the risk of developing all types of cancer by more than 60% in postmenopausal women living in Nebraska.<sup>14</sup> Providing a probiotic to expectant mothers before delivery, and to their infants for 6 months after birth decreased the risk of developing eczema in their children by 50% at 2 years of age.<sup>15</sup> Three-year trials of the DONA brand of glucosamine sulfate in people with osteoarthritis of the knee significantly reduced pain, and slowed disease progression.<sup>16,17</sup> In a systematic review of multiple clinical trials, zinc was determined to reduce the duration and severity of the common cold.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Ginkgo biloba did NOT prevent Alzheimer's disease in the Ginkgo Evaluation of Memory Study.<sup>19</sup> Most recently, supplementation with vitamin E as dl-alpha tocopherol for 6 years significantly increased the risk of developing prostate cancer in men who were enrolled in the SELECT study.<sup>20</sup> Naturopathic doctors who are graduates of accredited naturopathic medical colleges are trained to interpret the quality and results of these trials as a basis for their therapeutic decisions. Unqualified naturopaths who receive their degrees from correspondence schools lack the training to interpret the results of such studies. I have presented evidenced-based information on dietary supplements

at the last three annual national conferences of the American Academy of Physician Assistants. A paper that I wrote on dietary supplement-drug interactions will be published in the December issue of the peer-reviewed Journal of the American Academy of Physician Assistants.

Naturopathic doctors have extensive training in the basic medical sciences that serve as the foundation for clinical practice. Unqualified naturopaths lack such training. For example, an adolescent boy who presents with knee pain may in fact have a hip disorder known as Slipped Capital Femoral Epiphysis. The knee pain is referred from the hip. The hip problem is due to a fracture through the growth plate (epiphysis) in the head of the thigh bone (capital femoral). The work up requires an x-ray of the hip. This disorder requires referral to an orthopedic surgeon. I teach anatomy and physiology to physician assistants, and therefore, know that the training in those subjects provided to naturopathic doctors at accredited schools of naturopathic medicine is more extensive. Unqualified naturopaths lack the knowledge in basic sciences to make informed clinical decisions.

In conclusion, naturopathic doctors have a solid education in the basic medical and clinical sciences and the expertise to diagnose medical disorders. Naturopathic doctors have the training to safely and effectively use dietary supplements including botanical medicines in the treatment of medical disorders. There is no other healthcare profession that has the specific training to both diagnose medical disorders and utilize such therapies. This bill will not interfere with or limit any other healthcare provider or practitioner from using natural therapies as they have been or are currently permitted under their primary licenses. Licensing naturopathic doctors will contribute to the protection of the public's health and safety.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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