

Written Testimony Submitted by Suzanne Ickes, RD, LDN

House Democratic Policy Committee Public Hearing

April 9, 2012

Since I am unable to testify in person, I am submitting my written testimony to be entered into the hearing's record. My name is Suzanne Ickes RD, LDN. I am a dietitian in Private Practice. I am a provider for several healthcare insurance companies and I am asking that you work on legislation that would recognize Registered Dietitians as providers in all health insurance plans in our state.

While many insurance companies utilize Registered Dietitians, dietitian services are usually very limited. For example, most insurances will cover for at least one visit with the dietitian if the patient is diagnosed with diabetes. However, symptoms such as unexplained weight loss, pre-diabetes, disordered eating, obesity, are often not covered diagnoses. Also, even though some insurance companies cover for some dietitian services, this information is usually not made clear to their customers and so they remain unaware. At this time I would like narrow my focus to only one diagnosis that I would like to see covered by all insurance companies and that is pre-diabetes.

Pre-diabetes is a fasting blood glucose that is higher than the normal range of 100-126 milligrams (mg.) per deciliter. Once your fasting blood glucose tests twice at 127 mg. or higher, you have the diagnosis of diabetes. Understanding how carbohydrates affect blood glucose levels is key to the management of this disease. It is extremely unfortunate to have to wait until the disease has progressed to the diagnosis stage for primary treatment. In addition to my private practice, I also work part time as a dietitian in a hospital. It is not unusual to speak with a patient who has had diabetes for 5 – 20 years and learn that they have had no formal education on the diet. Most people with diabetes know nothing more about the diet other than “they should avoid sweets”. This is the quick simple message the doctors can give their patients and unfortunately it is often the only information they get. My patients are surprised to learn that fruit and milk raise their blood sugar. It is not difficult to learn about the diabetic diet but it does require time. Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT) by a registered dietitian for diabetes as well as or, should I say, especially for pre-diabetes is absolutely essential.

I am asking that all insurance companies educate those they serve about the dietitian benefits they provide. I am asking that ALL insurance companies cover for pre-diabetes counseling with a dietitian. Diabetes is a progressive disease. The earlier you develop diabetes the more likely you are to experience complications such as glaucoma, kidney disease, loss of nerve sensation, and amputations. Unfortunately what once was called “Adult onset diabetes” is now called Type 2 diabetes. Why? Because now it starts in children. Why should anyone, especially a child, have to wait until their disease progresses before learning how they can control it? People are encouraged when they have an understanding of the disease and see the difference they can make in their blood glucose (sugar) levels just by following some basic diet instructions. It is extremely cost effective to prolong- possibly eliminate the complications caused by chronic high blood sugar levels.