**Ohio Senate Insurance and Financial Institutions Committee**

**Proponent Testimony, Senate Bill 265**

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Chairman Hottinger, Vice Chair Hackett, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the Senate Insurance and Financial Institutions Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 265, which recognizes pharmacists as health care providers and permits health insurance companies to cover pharmacist-provided benefits.

My name is Dana Bachmann, and I am a community pharmacist for Kroger Health & Wellness within The Kroger Co., Columbus Division. Kroger Health & Wellness consists of 111 community pharmacies in Ohio where myself and the pharmacists I work with are focused on providing patient-centered care and helping our patients live healthier lives. Services provided by Kroger pharmacists extend well beyond dispensing medications, and as a pharmacist with Kroger Health & Wellness, I am able to provide a variety of patient care services such as immunizations, medication synchronization, medication therapy management (MTM), point-of-care testing (e.g., cholesterol, blood glucose, blood pressure), and disease state management (e.g., Diabetes, Heart Healthy, Fitness, Nutrition, & Weight Loss, and Smoking Cessation).

I mention the services I can provide as a community pharmacist to bring to light what pharmacists can do in a traditional community pharmacy but also to share how many of the services I can provide are underutilized by patients in our community. The reason for underutilization of services could be because:

* Patients and/or other health care providers such as physicians, physician’s assistants, or nurse practitioners, do not recognize what a pharmacist can do or the services a pharmacist can provide.
* Pharmacist-provided patient care services are not covered benefits by health insurance companies, and in a consumer-driven health care environment, patients are not going to pay for services they feel should already be covered by their insurance company or patients simply cannot afford the cost of health care services.

In any case, it all relates back to the fact that pharmacists not recognized as health care providers. I would like to take a moment to share a personal story with you. Last year, I wanted to implement a new patient care service where Kroger pharmacists at one pharmacy location would collaborate with family nurse practitioners (NPs) at a local federally qualified health center, or FQHC, located less than half a mile away from the pharmacy. The location for this service was chosen as the pharmacists and nurse practitioners had a great working relationship, and the pharmacy and FQHC were located in a medically underserved area where pharmacists could truly help impact patient care in the community.

In this collaborative, interdisciplinary patient care service, the FQHC would have identified patients with uncontrolled blood pressure and/or uncontrolled blood sugar and refer them to a Kroger pharmacist at the pharmacy for a comprehensive medication review, or CMR. During the CMR, the pharmacist would review all of the patient’s medication, provide education about the patient’s health and medications, and address any identified drug-related problems. If needed, the pharmacist also could have completed point-of-care testing (e.g., blood sugar, hemoglobin A1c, or blood pressure) and identified and administered any needed immunizations.

This service would have provided pharmacists the opportunity to work with other health care providers as an essential member of the health care team to increase patient’s access to care and to improve patient outcomes. However, this service was never implemented, and pharmacists were not able to help the nurse practitioners provide improved patient care for the patients at the health center.

I had worked hard to develop a trusting relationship with the nurse practitioners and to explain what a pharmacist could do to help improve care for their patients. I had a great meeting with the nurse practitioners, and they were excited and very interested in the patient care service the pharmacists could offer to their patients. They truly saw the value pharmacists could bring to the table. After this meeting, I thought this service had a great chance to move forward and to help patients in the community.

I was then confronted by a significant barrier that pharmacists face on a regular basis. Kroger pharmacists could only provide this service to a small portion of the patients seen by the nurse practitioners at the health center. This was because the service targeted patients with Ohio managed care plans that would cover the cost of the pharmacist-provided comprehensive medication reviews and additional pharmacy services. It was targeted to patients with managed care plans, as patients in this community would likely not be able to afford pharmacy services or feel pharmacist-provided services should already be covered by their health insurance company.

Once the nurse practitioners came to the realization this would be a targeted service for a limited number of their patients, they did not want to move forward with the new service if all of their patients could not benefit from seeing the pharmacist. At this point in time, the implementation of this patient care service came to an abrupt stop. Patients in this community were no longer going to have the opportunity to work with the pharmacists in the capacity of this service. All because pharmacists could only care for a portion of patients at the health center because pharmacist-provided services are not covered benefits.

Senate Bill 265 would offer the opportunity for pharmacists to be recognized as health care providers and the opportunity to overcome this significant barrier to pharmacist providing patient care to patients in our communities. The passage of this bill would provide pharmacists with the opportunity to:

* Change the perception of what pharmacists can do and be valued as an essential member of the health care team by patients and other health care providers such as physicians, physician’s assistants, and nurse practitioners;
* Provide patient care services to more patients in the community, as pharmacist-provided services will be permitted as covered benefits with health insurance companies; and
* Most importantly, improve care and outcomes for patients in our communities.

With this in mind, I urge you to support Senate Bill 265. Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to provide supporting testimony for this bill. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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