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June 8, 2020

Dear Honorable Chairs Representative Dobson and Senator Hise:

Re: Please Support SB 361 (Part V. Step Therapy Protocols) in Conferee Committee to Protect Continuity in Care for NC Patients

The Association of Women in Rheumatology (AWIR) promotes the science and practice of Rheumatology, fosters the advancement and education of women in rheumatology, and advocates for access to the highest quality health care and management of patients with Rheumatic diseases. While there are no cures for Rheumatic diseases, medical research breakthroughs have led to treatments and therapies that can dramatically improve the quality of life for those living with rheumatic diseases.

Step therapy protocols, also known as “fail first”, require patients to try then fail on lower-cost drugs selected by their insurance company before coverage is granted for the drug prescribed by the patient’s provider. For patients living with serious or chronic illnesses – prolonging treatment (and delaying access to the right treatment) can result in disease progression and irreversible damage.

Patients deserve supportive, transparent insurance coverage – free from barriers that make it harder to get the best possible treatment. It’s critical that medical decisions are in the hands of patients and their providers – and not with insurance companies.

Right now, North Carolinians wait weeks, months or even years battling step therapy, even though more than 20 states have already reformed the process. Step-therapy inhibits physicians from being able to provide individualized care, sacrifices valuable treatment time, and may cause patients to suffer unnecessarily.

Senate Bill 361 would give providers a clear and transparent process to exempt their patients from step therapy protocols when it is medically necessary.

A physician’s medical decision-making expertise in consultation with their patients should drive treatment decisions. Basing treatment decisions on cost rather than clinical considerations ignores important variations that may exist among patients in terms of safety, efficacy and tolerability in drug classes. Slight deviations in treatment and variations between drugs, even those in the same therapeutic class, can cause serious, adverse events. The resulting disease progression can be irreversible, life threatening, and cause the patient’s original treatment to lose effectiveness.

For these reasons, AWIR urges you to support, SB 361 which would reform step-therapy protocols in a fair and balanced manner. Thank you in advance for you time and attention regarding this important patient protection issue.

Sincerely,



Grace C. Wright, MD
President, AWIR

cc: Members of the Conferee Committee
Rep. Donny Lambeth
Rep. Donna McDowell White
Rep. Larry Potts
Sen. Joyce Krawiec
Sen. Jim Burgin
Sen. Jim Perry

