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LEGISLATION FILED TO HELP ARKANSAS PATIENTS ACCESS CRITICAL MEDICATIONS

SB99 LIMITS “STEP THERAPY” AND GIVES PATIENTS AND PROVIDERS MORE POWER

Patient and healthcare provider groups from across Arkansas today celebrated the introduction of Senate Bill 99-legislation that when passed will protect patients from potentially harmful use of an insurer practice known as step therapy or “fail first.”

Senator Cecile Bledsoe (R-District 3) and Senator David Wallace (R-District 22) are the Senate sponsors on SB99, which has been referred to the Senate Public Health, Welfare and Labor Committee. Representative DeAnn Vaught (R-District 4) will carry the bill in the House.

Step therapy, also known as “fail first,” is a process that requires patients to try and fail one or more medications chosen by their insurer before they can access the treatment prescribed by their healthcare provider. These policies can be a burden to patients, often causing delays of weeks or even months before getting access to the treatment they need.

“Despite what we may have learned and even in the midst of the pandemic, I continue to see my patients suffer the effects of a healthcare system that is simply stacked against them in favor of insurance company profits,” said Dr. Michael Saitta, President of the Arkansas Rheumatology Association. “Step therapy bypasses the medical expertise of doctors and doesn't always take into account the individual needs or medical history of Arkansas patients.”

The legislation will not ban the use of step therapy, but instead require reasonable timelines for exceptions requests and appeals, ensure that when implemented, step therapy requirements will be based on medical and clinical guidelines, and not require patients to try and fail on medications they have already taken or that are not in their best medical interest based on their personal medical history or condition.

“It’s exasperating and dangerous,” said Dr. Saitta. “I can’t recall the last time I didn’t have to beg the insurance companies to cover the medication I prescribe for my patients. Some days, my staff and I spend more time on administrative appeals than actually with our patients.”

More than two dozen other states including Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana have already enacted similar legislation to put protections in place around the use of step therapy.

Organizations supporting Step Therapy reform in Arkansas include: Arkansas Rheumatology Association, Allergy and Asthma Network, Alliance for Patient Access, American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, Arthritis Foundation, American College of

Rheumatology, Association of Women in Rheumatology, Association for Clinical Oncology, Coalition of State Rheumatology Organizations, Creaky Joints, Epilepsy Foundation (of Missouri and Kansas), Global Healthy Living, International Cancer Advocacy Network, Infusion Access Foundation, Susan G. Komen, Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, Mended Hearts, Multiple Sclerosis Association of America, National Eczema Association, National Hemophilia Foundation, National Infusion Center Association, National Multiple Sclerosis Society, National Organization for Rare Disorders, National Psoriasis Foundation, and Rheumatology Nurses Society.

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