

Oral Testimony on:
HB 2139 – Licensure of Dental Therapist

Presented to:
House Health and Human Services Committee

By:
Bryan R. Brady, Chief Executive Officer of First Care Clinic and Board President of the Kansas
Association for the Medically Underserved

Chairman Hawkins and members of the committee:

I am Bryan Brady, CEO of the First Care Clinic and Board President of the Kansas Association for the Medically Underserved. I appreciate the opportunity to present oral testimony about Dental Therapists and how it would impact my clinic and the residents of Northwest Kansas.

First Care Clinic is part of a network represented by the Kansas Association of the Medically Underserved that provides access to affordable dental care. Included in this network are 22 safety net clinics that employ 40 dentists, with an additional 26 volunteer dentists. My clinic is in Hays, KS and serves some of the most vulnerable populations in Northwest Kansas. We provide comprehensive dental services to all regardless of ability to pay and by doing this we save the healthcare system costly emergency room visits by seeing patients that no one else will accept. For these patients finding a dentist can be more than a challenge, it can be almost impossible and it has truly become more challenging over the last few months. At my clinic finding qualified dentists who want to live in Western Kansas presents a huge barrier in providing care. Our clinic is fully staffed with two dentists; we are now on month thirteen of having only one dentist and unfortunately there is no end in sight. We work with multiple recruiting firms to assist us in our efforts of finding qualified providers but have yet to find a second dentist to help serve our patients. In the past when we could recruit we often find that they come only for the loan repayment and leave after their obligations are fulfilled, leaving us with a revolving door of dentists and an expensive recruiting bill every 2-3 years.

Another challenge we face is that we were recently notified that a local dentist was going to stop taking KanCare patients. This dentist has stopped providing care for nearly 3,000 KanCare beneficiaries. The problem with this is twofold: not only are there 3,000 patients that do not have a dentist and are turning to my clinic for help, but this local dentist was our only source of sedation dentistry in the county for us to refer to and they are no longer willing to provide these



services to KanCare patients. This dentist cited the 4% provider cut as the reason for their decision.

This is only one story from the across the state but I assure you there are more stories where many Kansans are going without needed dental care because of a lack of dentists. Currently there are 83% of Kansas counties without enough dental providers. The problem multiplies when you look at KanCare beneficiaries and uninsured patients. Currently there are only two clinics in the northwest part of the State that will accept anyone regardless of their ability to pay.

I feel there is a solution to ease the dental provider shortage we are currently facing. It's called a Dental Therapist. A mid-level provider that can practice under the supervision of a dentist and perform cleanings, fillings and simple extractions. Does this sound familiar to you? It should because in 1976 certification for advanced nursing practice was instituted in Kansas. In Western Kansas, there would be no way that healthcare could be provided the way it is now without the use of a midlevel provider. Nurse practitioners provide high quality healthcare and are cost effective. In some rural towns in Western Kansas, Nurse Practitioners even run the emergency room because it is not feasible to recruit enough physicians to staff the emergency room. The Dental Therapist is the solution to ease the similar dental workforce shortage and provide Kansans access to high-quality dental services.

The time is now to create a Dental Therapist in Kansas. Allow dental practices in Kansas to use the midlevel provider to expand the care they are providing. In a time where costs are exceeding revenues, why not vote for a bill that uses a cost-effective model for providing dental care while creating new jobs in Kansas.

I respectfully urge you to pass HB 2139 out of committee. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Bryan R. Brady
Chief Executive Officer