

MedChi

The Maryland State Medical Society

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TO: The Honorable Joan Carter Conway, Chairman
Members, Senate Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee
The Honorable Catherine Pugh

FROM: Joseph A. Schwartz, III
Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
J. Steven Wise

DATE: March 9, 2011

RE: **OPPOSE** – Senate Bill 560 – *Health Occupations – State Board of Naturopathic Medicine*

The Maryland State Medical Society (MedChi), which represents over 7,300 Maryland physicians and their patients, opposes Senate Bill 560.

Senate Bill 560 establishes a State Board of Naturopathic Medicine, and seeks to make Maryland one of only 15 states that license this alternative health care practice.

MedChi's primary concern is the scope of practice granted to a Naturopathic Physician. Senate Bill 560 permits the individual to "order and perform physical and laboratory examinations for diagnostic purposes," and to "prescribe, dispense or administer any controlled substance," among other things (*see* pp. 14-15). Indeed, the "Board," comprised of five licensed naturopaths and two consumers, is given extraordinary authority: A licensee cannot prescribe prescription drugs, "unless the licensee is approved by the Board to do so"; a licensee may do "minor office procedures" if the licensee "meets the training requirements...adopted by the Board." Rather than conforming to a national standard for training and education to perform certain tasks, like dispensing prescription drugs, the Board can effectively allow a licensed individual to engage in any practice it deems appropriate.

Permitting the diagnosis and treatment of diseases and the dispensing of controlled dangerous substances is equivalent to the practice of medicine (*see* Health Occ's, §14-101(n)). Yet, the experience and training of these individuals is significantly less than that of a physician. A naturopathic physician completes four years of graduate studies, which

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include only a minimum of 720 hours of clinical training. This pales in comparison to that of a physician, who completes 12,000 – 16,000 of such training and 3-7 years of residency. Indeed, the American Medical Association notes serious defects in the training of naturopathic physicians in recognizing specific diseases such as cancer, diseases of the blood, heart attacks and the like, which patients will certainly expect to be diagnosed when seeing a “physician.” See AMA Scope of Practice Series—Naturopaths (July 2009).

The advocates of this measure argue that this “practice” is going on today, so legislation like this is needed to legitimize it. While the time may come when Maryland follows the minority of states who have licensed naturopathic physicians, MedChi does not believe Senate Bill 560 is the proper bill to do so, nor is this the proper time. Senate Bill 560 sanctions what clearly constitutes the practice of medicine by individuals with education and training that is not equivalent to that of a physician would not be in the interest of the public health and safety, in MedChi’s view.

For these reasons, MedChi opposes Senate Bill 560.

For more information call:

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