

Testimony of Dr. Dave Pavao, PT, DPT
Clinical Officer, Highbar Physical Therapy

House bill H 5623
4/1/25

Subject: The Harmful Impact of Utilization Review and Prior Authorization on Patient Access to Physical Therapy Care

Dear Chairwoman Donovan,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H 5623 and to the challenges posed by utilization review and prior authorization requirements in physical therapy. As a Doctor of Physical Therapy with over 15 years of clinical experience, I have witnessed firsthand how these administrative processes create significant barriers to timely and effective care for my patients.

The intention behind utilization review and prior authorization is often cited as ensuring appropriate care and controlling costs. However, in reality, these processes frequently delay access to necessary physical therapy treatment, increase administrative burdens on providers, and ultimately lead to worse patient outcomes.

One of the most significant barriers is the delay in care. Patients often wait days or even weeks for authorization, during which time their condition can deteriorate, leading to prolonged recovery, increased pain, and in some cases, unnecessary reliance on more costly interventions such as medications, imaging, or even surgery. For example, I recently had a patient recovering from a rotator cuff repair who needed immediate post-operative therapy to regain motion and prevent complications. Due to prior authorization delays, his care was postponed, and by the time he was approved, he had developed significant stiffness and weakness that required a much longer and more intensive rehabilitation process—one that could have been avoided had he received timely care.

Additionally, the administrative burden placed on physical therapists is substantial. Therapists must spend hours justifying their care decisions through documentation, resubmissions, and peer-to-peer reviews—time that should be spent treating patients. In many cases, peer-to-peer reviews require therapists to step away from patient care to argue for treatments that are already backed by clinical guidelines and best practices. This disrupts workflow, reduces efficiency, and ultimately limits the number of patients we can serve.

Perhaps most importantly, these delays and barriers lead to poorer outcomes for patients. Physical therapy is most effective when delivered in a timely and progressive manner. When care is interrupted due to authorization delays, patients often lose critical momentum in their recovery, experience increased pain and frustration, and in some cases, even drop out of care altogether. This not only affects their quality of life but also leads to higher overall healthcare costs as untreated conditions escalate.

As healthcare professionals, we are committed to providing the highest standard of evidence-based care for our patients. However, the increasing burden of prior authorization and utilization review makes it more difficult for us to do our jobs effectively. I urge you to support legislative efforts that reduce unnecessary prior authorization requirements, streamline the approval process, and prioritize patient access to timely physical therapy care.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any opportunity to discuss this further and provide additional insight into the real-world impact these barriers have on my patients and colleagues.

Sincerely,

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