

Radiological
Society
Colorado

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April 24, 2018

To Members of the Senate State Affairs Committee

Dear Members:

Thank you for your consideration of support for HB18-1114 on behalf of the Colorado Radiological Society.

The field of genetics is rapidly changing with new discoveries impacting all aspects of medicine and medical care, and patients are increasingly making health care decisions based on their personal risk factors. Many new tests that identify these risk factors have complex results, requiring appropriate correlation with history and other exams to determine what this test result means for the patient.

The genetic tests are improving rapidly and providing an increasing amount of information that needs to be examined and applied to a patient. The care is becoming increasingly individualized as we develop more advanced testing.

While this is excellent news for medicine, we need to ensure that the results of these expensive gene tests are appropriately understood, acted upon and documented. In the past, the gene assays performed resulted in a few specific diagnoses that had somewhat reliable data regarding risk of cancer and disease. As the field rapidly expands, counselors responsible for discussing the results of these genetic tests need to be versed in every nuance of the test, including the limitations of the test.

For instance, if a Colorado woman has a test result return with "Variant of unknown significance"- we would want to ensure that someone knowledgeable with this result counsels her appropriately for her risk. We would want to ensure that prophylactic surgeries were NOT recommended for this result and the appropriate follow up (if any) was instituted. We would also want to ensure that if the test did find an actionable mutation which the appropriate referrals happened, and the patient received the appropriate care in a timely manner. I was recently at a Breast Surgeons conference that had a genetics workshop and a polling device to determine practice behaviors. The surgeons were able to interpret the exam results from a modified genetics panel correctly less than 35% of the time. 85% of the audience indicated that genetic counselors/geneticists were the individuals that interpreted the results and made recommendations for their practice.

Ideally this would always happen for every patient. However, if there is no oversight over the counselors who are both recommending the gene panels and discussing their results, **there is opportunity for harm with no oversight for correction of out of scope behaviors.** As the field of genetics changes, practitioners must stay current with their knowledge to correctly interpret the exam results and make the appropriate treatment referrals when necessary.

While we have oversight over physicians and nurses providing this care through our nursing and medical licensing boards, there is no current oversight over the counselors charged with interpreting and discussing the results and ensuring that they direct the patients to the appropriate care provider based on those results.

A nonqualified person could order these exams (in fact, patients can now order their own genetic tests on the internet without an order) and incorrectly interpret these exams- either directing the patient to unnecessary care or failing to direct the patient to the necessary care. There would be no way to prevent that individual from performing the same harm to the next patient. This could also result in increased costs to our health care system if appropriate referrals are not placed in a timely manner, or if inappropriate medical recommendations are made based upon a misunderstanding of a test result.

Genetic counselors are becoming an integral part of patient care and the health care team. Licensure would help ensure that CO women are provided education and counseled about their results, plus their results are effectively communicated to the proper care providers. We should be proactive in ensuring that only trained and licensed individuals who fully understand the scope of the results are counseling our patients.

Thank you again and I would ask for your support on HB18-1114.

Dr. Alison Sandberg
On behalf of Colorado Radiological Society