



**TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
SUBMITTED TO THE
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2015**

**HB 5528, An Act Concerning Continuing Education For Health Care
Providers Who Prescribe Narcotic Drugs**

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony concerning **HB 5528, An Act Concerning Continuing Education For Health Care Providers Who Prescribe Narcotic Drugs**. CHA supports this bill as one component of a comprehensive statewide strategy to reduce the misuse and abuse of opioids and other prescription drugs in Connecticut.

Before commenting on the bill, it's important to point out that Connecticut hospitals treat everyone who comes through their doors 24 hours a day, regardless of ability to pay.

This is a time of unprecedented change in healthcare, and Connecticut hospitals are leading the charge to transform the way care is provided. They are focused on providing safe, accessible, equitable, affordable, patient-centered care for all, and they are finding innovative solutions to integrate and coordinate care to better serve their patients and communities.

Opioids are narcotic drugs that reduce pain signals to the brain. Opioids and other types of controlled substances can be a safe and effective tool to manage pain, but they may be misused or abused by people seeking their euphoric effect. Opioid abuse can lead to addiction, chronic illness, or death. Over the past four years, Emergency Departments (EDs) have seen a 50 percent increase in opioid overdoses. In 2014, there were nearly 1,900 Connecticut hospital ED visits related to opioid overdoses.

Connecticut hospitals are already engaged in efforts to reduce inappropriate opioid use. The recent development of voluntary opioid prescribing guidelines to help ED staff treat patients with chronic pain conditions is one such example. Formulated by hospital ED directors in collaboration with other prescribers and the Department of Public Health, the guidelines will help reduce the inappropriate use of opioids while preserving the vital role of hospital EDs in treating patients with emergent medical conditions.

CHA has partnered with other professional societies and the Department of Public Health to sponsor continuing education programs for prescribers on the topic of controlled substances. On November 7, 2014, CHA hosted a program for opioid prescribers entitled *Extended Release & Long-Acting Opioid Analgesics: Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategies (REMS)*. This program addressed the use of opioid analgesics, which are abuse-deterrent drugs that are manufactured with physical, chemical, or other barriers that make abuse more difficult or less attractive to patients. These drugs are emerging as another important tool for addressing prescription opioid abuse. Programs such as these enable professionals to update and sharpen their skills, further their education, and continue their professional development.

The development of the prescribing guidelines and the presentation of programs on the use of abuse-deterrent drugs are part of a broader statewide strategy to reduce the impact of opioid addiction, and demonstrate the willingness of hospitals and physicians to engage in multi-sector collaboration with the state to address this problem.

HB 5528 will require each healthcare provider who is authorized to prescribe narcotic drugs to complete one hour of continuing education during each license registration period on the topic of controlled substances. Given the breadth and scope of the problem, requiring a prescriber to attend a one hour continuing education program concerning the prescription of narcotics is a reasonable way to further inform, educate, and fortify prescribers in the fight against drug abuse. CHA believes that a comprehensive statewide strategy to combat the abuse of opioids and other controlled substances should include this measure.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. For additional information, contact CHA Government Relations at (203) 294-7310.