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Testimony for Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee on SB49

Chairwoman Mary Pilcher-Cook and Members of the Committee:

Background on Kansas Health Foundation

The mission of the Kansas Health Foundation is to improve the health of all Kansans. To achieve this, we promote health and wellness in our schools, neighborhoods and workplaces. Grow leaders in our communities. Inspire decision makers. Act as a voice for healthy public policy. And start and foster community philanthropy that will see our mission thrive for generations. Together with our grantees and partners, we want Kansas to be the healthiest, most productive, most livable state in the nation. Since 1985, we have provided more than \$500 million in grants to Kansas communities and maintain an asset base today of approximately \$500 million, which makes us the largest health foundation based in Kansas.

Foundation History Addressing Health Profession Shortages

The Foundation has a proud history of closing gaps across the state's health profession shortages with systemic, long-term solutions.

For example, in the early 1990s when the state faced a profound shortage of primary care providers, the Foundation funded a collaborative effort to support the University of Kansas Medical Center (KUMC), Wichita State University (WSU) and Fort Hays State University (FHSU) to implement a multi-site Master of Science Primary Care Nurse Practitioner Program. In 1995, two additional sites were added at Pittsburg State and Garden City (St. Catherine's Hospital). Since the collaborative began, a total of 649 nurse practitioners have graduated from the program serving 91 counties.

Additionally, through a grant to WSU, the Foundation helped double the size of the physician assistant (PA) program. The most recent data shows approximately 95 percent of PA graduates remained in Kansas with 34 percent practicing in rural Kansas.

Also, in 1993, we provided a grant to the KUMC to increase the percentage of students entering primary care residency. Through this grant, KUMC raised the percentage from 47 to 65 percent.

Dental Health Provider Shortage and the RDP

Today, I am here to talk about a similar, critical, healthcare profession shortage that the Foundation and others have identified.

Since the Foundation was first formed in 1985 from the sale of Wesley Medical Center in Wichita, we have regularly engaged Kansans across the state to ask them what they believe are the leading health problems in their communities. I have been employed by the Foundation 27 of those 30 years. Over that time frame, Kansans have consistently listed oral health care as a primary health concern, noting there are not enough providers to meet their needs and very few providers accept Medicaid coverage. We heard this especially in Western and Southeastern Kansas.

Data shows that 95 of Kansas' 105 counties do not have enough dental providers, especially rural communities. This trend is projected to worsen as the "baby boomer" dentists retire.

One clear solution is the development of a mid-level practitioner, or what is referred to as a Registered Dental Practitioner (RDP).

Several states and 52 other countries are addressing dental workforce shortages by utilizing RDPs, mid-level dental providers. Every study conducted on providers like RDPs shows they provide safe, quality care to patients. Alaska and Minnesota are already utilizing them and Maine just approved legislation to allow them. Studies have shown deploying just one RDP, allows a dental practice to be able to schedule 2,000 to 3,000 more appointments annually.

Following Previous Successful Models

We believe the success of utilizing RDPs in the dental field will be very similar to the success we have seen with mid-level practitioners in the medical field (PA's and NP's). I recall being at the Foundation when we first began talking about the Nurse Practitioner program in Kansas in the early 1990s. I can assure you, many physicians were threatened and raised similar safety concerns to what you may hear today.

KHF Will Provide Funding to Kansas Schools for Health Education

Besides the Foundation's overall commitment to the strategy of deploying RDPs, I want to confirm we are financially committed to making the RDP program a success once it is approved by the state legislature. In fact, we have already begun conversations with WSU and FHSU, informing both universities that we stand ready to assist them with start-up costs associated with beginning educational programs at both universities. Just as we did with the Nurse Practitioner, Physician's Assistant, and Primary Care Education programs, we are firmly committed to making this program a success in Kansas.

Oral Health Affects Overall Health; Opportunity to Prevent Kansans from Being Sick

Without access to dental care, many Kansans are forced to go without the check-ups and preventive care they need to stay healthy and prevent more costly medical problems. Dental health isn't just about teeth. We know that poor dental health leads to poor health in other parts of the body, including heart disease, diabetes and stroke. For children in particular, poor dental health can lead to lifelong medical problems and greatly impact their ability to learn in school. Access to regular dental services can help people control chronic diseases, which is a key tenant to the Foundation's focus on health prevention.

For these reasons and more, we believe the RDP model is right for Kansas. We respectfully request that committee members support Senate Bill 49.