

Illinois State Medical Society



MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Members of the Illinois House of Representatives

FROM: Erin O'Brien, Vice President
Kimberly B. Janas, Assistant Vice President and Assistant Legislative Counsel
Scott Reimers, Assistant Vice President

RE: Oppose HB 5809 (Rep. Mussman) – Efforts to Allow Pharmacists to Prescribe Birth Control

DATE: March 30, 2016

The physician members of the Illinois State Medical Society respectively urge you to vote “NO” on House Bill 5809, a measure that would inappropriately blur the roles of physicians and pharmacists by allowing pharmacists to prescribe birth control.

Physicians are opposed to letting pharmacists prescribe drugs. While pharmacists are experts in drugs and are an essential part of the health care team, they are not experts in diagnosing and treating conditions, diseases and other maladies of the human body. Pharmacists and physicians have very distinct roles in our health care system and blurring those roles is not in the best interest of patient safety and will only increase episodic care.

Treating women and assessing what method of birth control is appropriate (of which there exists an enormous variety in type and dosage) requires more than simply having them fill out a form of their health history and current lifestyle choices. These drugs are not benign drugs, which is why they are regulated by the FDA and require a prescription from the treating health care professional. Until the FDA rules them safe enough to be sold over the counter, physicians do not believe it is good public policy to draft laws skirting that process, which is designed to protect patient safety.

While most side effects of birth control are not serious, side effects that include abdominal pain, chest pain, headaches, blurred vision, and swelling or aching in the legs indicate risks for liver disease, stroke, and blood clots. If a patient were complaining of side effects that could indicate such conditions, a physician would initiate appropriate medical intervention, not simply take the patient off of the pill or prescribe another form of birth control.

Finally, some women only ever visit a physician or other appropriate health care professional when seeking out a prescription for birth control. Physicians utilize this time to counsel the women on other health care issues and offer important screenings such as pelvic exams and pap smears. Physicians remain concerned about policies that enhance episodic care and further discourage women from seeking care from a physician.

Allowing pharmacists to prescribe drugs will not improve access to important health services and is detrimental to patient care. **For these reasons, we respectively urge you to vote “NO” on HB 5809.**