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May 6, 2015

New Jersey House of Representatives
Legislative Hall
125 West State Street
Trenton, NJ 08625

RE: Assembly Committee Substitute for A-2477 - *Support*

Dear Member, New Jersey House of Representatives:

My name is Pat Heavener, and I am writing you today as an Andover, NJ resident who has lived with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) for 6 years. As a member of CreakyJoints - an arthritis community with approximately 80,000 members that is managed by the non-profit Global Healthy Living Foundation (GHLF) - I am aware of Assembly Substitute for A-2477. **I believe that this bill updates New Jersey law to cover biologics and biosimilars in a way that protects patients like me, and I am asking that you vote for its passage.**

Unlike traditional chemical drugs, biologics have unique, complex structures made from living cells that are not easily understood or replicated. A small change or difference in the biosimilar or biologic has the potential to either help or adversely affect patients like me.

There are two substitution requirements that A-2477 contains that GHLF and I believe are key in order to ensure patient safety. First, the bill requires that pharmacists dispensing an interchangeable biosimilar notify the prescribing physician. Second, the pharmacist must also keep a written record of the substitution as well as record on the prescription label.

For patients, these two provisions are crucial, sensible, and potentially life saving. We believe that the choice of which medicine is prescribed should be decided **only** by patients and physicians. Only a doctor has the full spectrum of a patient's medical history. In addition, if it is determined by the doctor and patient that an interchangeable biosimilar can be substituted for a biologic, or is the preferred treatment in a particular case, it is important that proper record keeping be in place in order to track any adverse events that may occur.

It is important that I share my story with you so that you can understand just how important this proposed legislation is for the thousands of patients in New Jersey like me who rely on life changing biologics. I began showing symptoms of RA many years before my definitive diagnosis. Numerous doctors and I as part of the ageing process brushed off migrating joint pains. I collected a shelf full of anti-inflammatories and pain meds in the process. I have a

collection of braces for every joint, hands, ankles, wrists, both right and left sides, and compression gloves for the parts in between.

My definitive diagnosis was the direct result of a major flare. The short story is that one morning I woke up and literally, every part of my body was in major pain. (Did you know that your toe bones could hurt? I didn't.) I was, quite literally, crippled. Everyday tasks became impossible. Imagine trying to fix your hair without being able to grip a brush or raise your arms above elbow level.

Initially, I had thought that it would be easy to make accommodations for any difficulties by giving myself extra time to perform everyday tasks. Sounds like a reasonable plan, right? What I did not count on was the fatigue. Just the simple morning routine of getting out of bed and taking a shower would take well over an hour, and at the end of that hour I was almost too tired to move. Then it would take me almost 20 minutes to back myself down the stairs on my knees, and this was just to get to the main part of the house.

Aside from the obvious physical challenges, no one tells you what a major inflammatory episode does to your brain. Inflammation directly affects the thought process, and answering a simple question often requires a unique thought process. You can just imagine how difficult the adjustment process is for a formerly functioning adult, particularly since I knew what I had been capable of "before."

I have been on all of the usual medications for RA; my physician and I started with the least toxic and we have worked our way up. I have been on prednisone, and various anti-inflammatory drugs. I am currently taking Methotrexate, Plaquenil, and the biologic drug Humira. Some of these are potentially toxic drugs, and I must have regular monitoring of kidney function, and see a Retinal Ophthalmologist every six months. While I have been fortunate enough not to have any drug interactions, it remains extremely important that my doctor and I are notified about what I am taking so we know which drug or component might cause an adverse reaction or toxicity. This safeguard must continue, and it will if Senate Substitute 1 is passed.

The development of biosimilars gives people like me hope and the chance of continuing a relatively normal life, because while Humira is working, if it stops, I know I can try biosimilars.

However, as my story shows, it is very important when you are immunosuppressed, and take multiple medications, that you know **EXACTLY** what you are putting into your body. Biologics and Biosimilars are cutting edge and exciting therapies that offer people fighting chronic diseases hope. Hope for healing. Hope for a better future.

Proactive state leaders across the country are recognizing the value and importance of updating their state laws to accommodate biosimilars and ensure their safe adoption. It is my understanding that on March 25th, 2014, Governor Pence of Indiana signed SB 262 into law.



Indiana Senate Bill 262 amended Indiana pharmacy regulations for the treatment of biosimilars by maintaining the proper communication between pharmacists and prescribing physicians. Matching bills in Delaware, Massachusetts, Utah, Colorado, and Georgia were also signed into law. As a result, thousands of patients across the country have been protected and better served by their representatives.

As our elected state leaders, we need to work together as a team to ensure that the physicians of New Jersey, like Indiana, are in charge of the drugs prescribed, that patient safety is the top priority in the health care process and that medical decisions remain between a doctor and his or her patient. I urge Members of the New Jersey House of Representatives to vote for the passage of Senate Substitute 1 for A-2477 because it introduces biosimilars to New Jersey in a way that ensures the safety of patients and preserves the physician-patient relationship.

I appreciate your thoughtful consideration of my remarks and would be pleased to provide any further information you may require.

Respectfully,

Pat Heavener,
Arthritis Patient
CreakyJoints Member
Andover, New Jersey

