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Talking Points

SB 972/ HB 515: Improving Access to Care

By Senator Burt Saunders and Representative Juan Carlos Zapata

Overview: This bill improves Florida's citizens' ability to access healthcare by allowing advanced registered nurse practitioners to better meet the needs of patients in medically underserved areas and medically underserved populations by prescribing medications in schedules II, III, IV, and V, in compliance with a protocol agreement with a supervising physician.

There is a shortage of healthcare providers in Florida. There are significantly fewer physicians and advance practice nurses practicing in our state than are necessary to meet the healthcare needs of our citizens. Medically underserved areas and medically underserved populations as defined by the Department of Health and Human Services are the areas in which these shortages are most acutely felt.

This bill allows ARNPs to meet the needs of their patients who require scheduled medications either for pain control or behavior modification.

Florida ARNPs have been prescribing medications with the exception of scheduled drugs since 1987. ARNPs are authorized to prescribe through a collaborative practice agreement with a physician licensed under Chapter 458 or 459 and may only prescribe those medications used within their scope of practice and contained within the protocol. However, ARNPs are educated to prescribe controlled substances along with other medications.

In compliance with Federal law, this bill also requires ARNPs to have a Federal DEA Number. The DEA issued regulations in 1993 which permitted Advanced Practice Nurses to obtain DEA numbers for the purpose of prescribing controlled substances. This privilege is closely scrutinized.

As states have begun to allow ARNPs to prescribe controlled substances, no state has withdrawn or limited the ARNPs' ability to prescribe. There has been no indication in any state that authorizing nurse practitioners to prescribe controlled substances directly increases prescription drug abuse. Florida is one of only three states which does not allow ARNPs to prescribe these medications to their patients who require them.

Controlled Substances are divided into five (5) schedules. Schedules II-V are commonly used in all patient care settings including family practice.

- Schedule I: Includes illegal drugs such as heroin, marijuana, LSD
- Schedule II: Includes commonly used medications such as Adderall and Ritalin for the management of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD); Demerol and morphine for pain management.
- Schedule III: Includes medications such as Vicoden and Tylenol with Codeine for patients with moderate pain levels.
- Schedule IV: Includes Ativan, Xanax, and Valium for anxiety, Ambien for sleep disorders.
- Schedule V: Includes medications such as Robitussin AC for cough and Lomotil for diarrhea.