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COALITION OF STATE RHEUMATOLOGY ORGANIZATIONS

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February 10, 2015

Washington House of Representatives
House Health Care & Wellness Committee
257A John L. O'Brien
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

RE: Support HB 1675 (Sullivan) – Prescription of biological products and interchangeable biological products

Dear Members of the House Health Care & Wellness Committee:

The Coalition of State Rheumatology Organizations (CSRO) is a national organization composed of 30 state and regional professional rheumatology societies formed in order to advocate and ensure excellence and access to the highest quality care for patients with rheumatologic and musculoskeletal disease.

Rheumatologists are especially aware of the dramatic long-term, life-changing clinical improvements that biological products have on some of the most disabling conditions that affect Americans. Biological products available for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis and other autoimmune diseases have had a significant impact on improving our patients' quality of life, preventing disability, and lowering mortality.

As the House Health Care and Wellness Committee considers recent bills on biologics and interchangeable substitution:

CSRO wishes to convey its support for the premise of HB 1675 (Sullivan). We would also like to emphasize the critical importance prescriber communication has on patient safety. As currently written, HB 1675 calls for prescriber communication within a "reasonable period of time." Requiring communication prior to dispensing, or at the very latest shortly after dispensing, offers physicians a more precise, safer window to understand and counter any adverse effects of medications.

CSRO opposes HB 1679 (Moeller) in its current form as it fails to include a prescriber communication provision.

In testimony before the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regarding biosimilars, Dr. Gregory Schimizzi, past president of CSRO, recommended that physicians should always be involved in decisions regarding their patient's use of a biosimilar. Allowing health systems to impose automatic substitutions for biologics, especially without notification, is unsafe for patients as it lacks clinical consideration of the effects.

CSRO recognizes that follow-on biologics and biosimilars are a natural evolution of medications and as the FDA is expected to approve the first biosimilar drugs this year, we welcome the important consideration of HB 1675. At the same time, we must insist that patient safety remain the most important concern and request all legislation on biosimilars allow physicians to quickly know what medicine their patient receives and if a patient's biologic medicine is substituted.

Sincerely,

Michael Schweitz, M.D.
President, CSRO