



June 22, 2009

The Honorable Jackie Speier
United States House
211 Cannon
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congresswoman Speier:

Consumers Union, the independent, non-profit publisher of *Consumer Reports* supports H.R. 2937, "The MRSA Infection Prevention and Patient Protection Act." We strongly endorse your effort, and the effort of others in Congress, to call attention to the public health crisis of health care acquired infections and specifically to the problem of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) infections. Prevention and public accountability regarding this mostly preventable harm should be a priority for our health care system.

Recent estimates indicate that the prevalence of MRSA is greater than in prior years, causing about 19,000 deaths a year. The CDC estimates that hospital-acquired infections of all kinds, not just those caused by MRSA, are killing almost 100,000 Americans a year. That is a shocking death rate of about 11 people an hour.

Clearly, Congress needs to do more to call attention to this problem and to ensure that our nation's health care facilities are screening for infections and taking the strongest possible actions to combat the spread of infection, particularly among vulnerable hospital populations.

Your bill takes a strong stand against the spread of MRSA by requiring screening for MRSA and public reporting of MRSA and other infection rates. Consumers Union's Stop Hospital Infections Campaign has been working for more than five years to help pass laws at the State level to require the public reporting of hospital infection rates. Twenty-six states now have enacted disclosure laws, including disclosure and MRSA laws in your state, California. We now believe it is also important to enact a strong national law that will require all hospitals to participate in this national fight against infection.

Your bill will require hospitals to use a proven strategy to prevent the spread of MRSA in the hospital setting where it does the most damage. Frankly, prevention is our only hope to curb this and other deadly superbugs that cannot be stopped by most of the antibiotics available today. Currently only five states require screening high risk patients for MRSA

and it could take many years to get all of the states to adopt similar measures. The national standard you are proposing would make hospitals safer across the nation. Further, early detection and isolation of patients carrying or infected by MRSA will save hospitals money when more infections are avoided.

We applaud provisions that would require hospitals to inform patients who are diagnosed with MRSA. A majority of the people who have shared their infection experiences with us said they were not fully informed about their infection. It is not uncommon for patients and their families to be totally in the dark about the source of their health problems. Your proposal also addresses other issues that have been repeatedly raised in the states: educating hospital staff about how MRSA is transmitted and prevented and ensuring that patients in isolation get appropriate attention by health care workers.

Again, we thank you for your initiative, and we look forward to working with you on the enactment of legislation to combat this public health crisis.

Sincerely,

William Vaughan
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Lisa McGiffert
Campaign Director, Stop Hospital Infections