

SAIM COALITION

— STATE ACCESS TO INNOVATIVE MEDICINES —

Dr. James Lord Professor LaShawnDa Pittman *Seattle, Washington*

Dr. James Lord is a gastroenterologist at Virginia Mason Hospital and Seattle Medical Center. Three doctors there see approximately 2000 inflammatory bowel disease patients. In addition, he spends over three days each week at Benayora Research Institute doing immunological research.

It wouldn't be a stretch to call him the "father" of step therapy legislation in Washington State. He was the main instigator behind getting the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation involved in seeking passage of step therapy reform, and he was integral – through his advocacy – in getting the law passed. When Governor Inslee signed the bill into law, Dr. Lord stood behind him.

Before the law passed, Dr. Lord explained that insurance companies preferred certain prescriptions which he called an "archaic therapy for the prior century." He said, "there is no place in modern medicine for such an approach... and it would be malpractice to follow formularies for certain patients."

Passage of the law in Washington State in 2020 changed everything for Professor Pittman; at long last she was able to access the biologic her doctor recommended.

One of the patients Dr. Lord has worked with for years is Dr. LaShawnDa Pittman, a university professor with state-regulated insurance who has struggled with ulcerative colitis since the age of 17. Until the law was passed in Washington State, she endured the same treatment – which often led to a horrible quality of life – for 30 years "due to insurance barriers like step therapy." She and Dr. Lord started talking about biologics in 2015 but even with his recommendation, the insurance company denied her three times; in the final denial they asked her to fail on a medication intended for leukemia patients. Dr. Lord told the insurer that that suggestion was "not only medically inappropriate but potentially illegal."

But as Dr. Pittman describes it, passage of the law in 2020 changed everything for her and at long last she was able to access the biologic her doctor recommended for her treatment. But she worries for the patients who don't have the energy or information to fight for the right drugs.

Although Dr. Lord is grateful for the Washington State law that requires insurance companies to respond to step therapy exception requests in an appropriate period, he is a proponent of passing a federal law so he can get the same results for patients with employer plans. And he is hopeful that Congress will pass broader reforms to limit the incentives that lead to poor and restrictive formulary design in the first place.

