

HB 456: House Bill 456: Maryland Department of Health – Public Health Outreach Programs – Cognitive Impairment, Alzheimer’s Disease, and Other Types of Dementia

February 12, 2020

Dear Chairwoman Pendergrass and Vice-Chair Pena-Melnyk,  
My name is Nancy Rodriguez-Weller. I am a resident of Salisbury, an assistant professor at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, and a Senior Care Consultant Pharmacist. My role as an educator includes: teaching our students how to communicate with diverse populations; the appropriate medication management of Alzheimer’s disease and dementia related disorders; and connecting students with geriatric providers.

Our role as pharmacists in the older adult population is to educate about different disease states and the medical management of these diseases. As pharmacists, we see older adults, especially those who have multiple disease states, cognitively decline over time. They may pick up their prescriptions, or inquire about over-the counter medications and have difficulty remembering their dates of birth or addresses, or start to have difficulty understanding the instructions given for their medications.

**As a provider, and as a health educator,** I cannot emphasize how important it is to be able to detect the signs and symptoms of dementia or Alzheimer’s early on, to have the patient take control of their health, and to prepare the patient and family for their future if they are diagnosed with such a devastating illness. According to the CDC statistics, “1 in 3 seniors dies with Alzheimer’s disease or another dementia.” That means that if you look to your right and your left, one of you will have Alzheimer’s disease, or one of you will be a caregiver.”

My first exposure to Alzheimer’s disease or dementia occurred when I was 12 years old, when I met my grandmother for the first time. She was so happy to see my father, but after a few minutes of conversation, she did not know who he was. My father recently passed away at the age of 92 years old with the same disease. I now know how difficult it is to be a caregiver, knowing that there was not much we could do for my father until he passed away.

House Bill 456 recommends requiring clinical staff members to perform brief assessment tools as part of the annual physical exam for individuals over the age of 65 years old. This bill also addresses the Medicare billing codes, so there can be reimbursement to incentivize early detection. All of these tools to manage brain health are key to preventing the progression of the disease, and to prepare the individual and family members impacted physically and financially. This bill addresses expanding education to all health care providers.

It would allow the Maryland Dept. of Health to provide outreach programs for resources to both clinicians and the general public. Providing education and resources to health care providers regarding brain health would allow many older adults to lead much healthier and productive lives, by encouraging changes in lifestyle choices; **linking better lifestyle choices to better cognitive health is not difficult, not costly, and would save lives.** In summary, approving this bill would benefit not just our older adult population in the state of Maryland, but would reduce the cost of healthcare in this state as well. I urge a favorable report.