Recognizing the Degenerative Aging Process as a Treatable Medical Condition

**Statement of Issue:** As shown for the US, patients with chronic age-related diseases expend in their last year of life about one third of the total Medicare expenditures (~$15,000 per person).[i] As of 2004, it was estimated that “75 percent of the $1.9 trillion spent on health care in the United States stem from preventable chronic health conditions … but only 1 percent is allocated to protecting health and preventing illness.”[ii] Thus, there is a vital need and urgent development and market expansion strategy for the pharmaceutical industry to provide effective, preventative treatments for a variety of aging-related diseases.

- **Early detection and preventative treatment** of aging-related diseases (such as Alzheimer’s disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer and heart disease) belongs in the field of aging research, as degenerative aging can be seen as the main risk factor and often direct cause of aging related diseases [iii, iv, v].
  - **Alzheimer’s disease and Cancer.** The savings from early detection and preventive intervention per patient are commonly estimated at several thousand dollars for the developed countries ($1,000-10,000+ for Alzheimer’s disease,[vi] $1,000-10,000+ for various forms of cancer [vii]).
  - Comparable savings can be expected from the early preventive treatment of heart disease and type 2 diabetes.[viii]
  - Of over 10,000 diseases and conditions, only about 500 have cures and treatments [ix].

**Context:** Called a “breakthrough” in bi-partisan politics by former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, the 21st Century Cures Act will, if passed, create a $1.8 billion fund for cures research and development, and will streamline the FDA approval process for new treatment.[x] Recently, the FDA approved the testing of Metformin, a decades-old diabetes medication, as the first drug to treat aging, due to its capacity to reduce by 30% all cancers in users. [xi]

**Comparison:** Widespread federal focus on cancer as a treatable disease in the 1970s significantly improved patient options and survival rates. At that time, only 1 of 2 cancer victims could expect to live beyond five years; now, that rate is 2 of every 3. These rates were directly related to a shift from a reactionary, surgical model to a preventative, pre-screening model. [xii]

**Policy Recommendation:**
A mandate for the inclusion of Degenerative Aging as a recognized and treatable medical condition. This includes the systemic factors that contribute to disease and frailty.

- **Advantages:** Would enable the existing legal framework to better tackle diseases and conditions that arise from the aging process from a preventative healthcare model.
  - Pharmaceutical industry can develop for market quickly new and existing preventative medications, like Metformin that decrease long-term healthcare costs.
Would open up new public funding for new pharmaceutical research and development.

Sources:


http://energycommerce.house.gov/fact-sheet/hr-6-21st-century-cures-act-frequently-asked-questions


[xii] American Cancer Society. 2014. The History of Cancer