



School of Medicine

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Dear Chair Keny-Guyer and the House Human Services and Housing Committee Members,

Today I'd like to introduce the work we are doing at OHSU to increase access to dementia specialty care. First, I want to thank you, Chair Keny-Guyer, and Committee Members for advocating for telemedicine care for Oregonians and for your work on SB 144.

Dr. Erten-Lyons and I are the lead researchers for the project, "Alzheimer's Care via Telemedicine for Oregon," (known as "ACT-ON") at the Layton Aging and Alzheimer's Center at OHSU. The aim of this project is to care for Oregonians living with Alzheimer's and their family caregivers using direct-to-home remote video technology. ACT-ON is funded through the Oregon Health Authority's federal State Innovation Model (SIM) grant. The SIM grant supports projects that advance Oregon's health system transformation efforts.

As you know, Oregon is facing a daunting challenge in addressing the needs of citizens with Alzheimer's disease. One concerning challenge is that access to expert care is limited to urban citizens because specialists, such as myself and Dr. Erten-Lyons, tend to be located in metropolitan areas. Furthermore, cognitive and physical impairments related to Alzheimer's can make travel to clinic sites difficult regardless of distance (please see Attachment A for a caregiver's comments on these challenges). These two issues converge in restricted access to specialty care for a substantial proportion of the 60,000 Oregonians with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

Through our research at OHSU, we aim to help families living with Alzheimer's by providing high-quality telemedicine care directly to the home. Currently, in order to receive telemedicine Alzheimer's care, Medicare beneficiaries must live in a rural county and must drive to a Medicare-designated "originating site" such as a hospital or clinic to receive care. Citizens with Alzheimer's who are covered by Medicare cannot receive direct-to-home telemedicine care. Our study, the first of its kind in Oregon, will test the feasibility of direct-to-home Alzheimer's care.

Telemedicine care is cost-effective, saving gas and hotel costs for patients; and clinic administrative costs for providers. In addition, telemedicine Alzheimer's care has the potential to delay skilled nursing home placement. By age 76, almost 50% of persons with Alzheimer's live in skilled care. Projections indicate that the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) will spend \$150 billion for long-term care and total health care for persons with dementia. Research has shown that ongoing family counseling and telephone support can

reduce the rate of skilled nursing home placement by 28%. For Oregon, this could translate into millions of dollars in savings.

Our ACT-ON project advances the State Plan for Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia's goals by increasing access to specialty care, but it will serve only 80 families. We will seek funding to sustain this program once our study is completed. We will also work to urge CMS to allow Medicare funding for direct-to-home telemedicine care.

We appreciate the work that you have done to make increase access to telemedicine care in Oregon. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you about our study and share with you our plans to address the future of Alzheimer's care in Oregon.

Sincerely,



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Attachment A: A Caregiver's Experience

“I would like to say how helpful it is to be able to talk to the specialist without having to go to Portland. For the last couple years (patient) has not been able to spend the nights away from his own bedroom. He even has trouble finding the bathroom, even though it is right off the bedroom, in our own home. When there is any change in his routine he can have accidents in his pants. As you know the cleanup is hard when you are not in your own home.

When we are away from home, he doesn't always tell me that he has to go to the bathroom until its too late. We had to buy new pants one time, so he wouldn't be embarrassed walking through the store.

Being able to talk to the specialist and still be close to home is great. I hope this can be made available for those that need it.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue.”