

The 21st Century Cures Initiative...And a Bold Plan

David Sheon | October 22, 2014

The one thing that Democrats and Republicans in the House of Representatives agree on is that they just don't agree. It's an old, tired state of affairs and the resulting gridlock affects everything from education to crime to defense. Thanks to two typical party rivals, this unfortunate paradigm may be shifting...all in the name of health and science.



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Fred Upton (R-Michigan) and Diane DeGette (D-Colorado) have set aside their differences and joined together to lead the [21st Century Cures Initiative](#). The initiative marks the first time in memory that Congress is taking a comprehensive look at what steps can be taken to accelerate the pace of cures in America. With the backing of the Energy & Commerce Committee (which Rep. Upton chairs), The House of Representatives is looking at “the full arc of this process – from the **discovery** of clues in basic science, to streamlining the drug and device **development** process, to unleashing the power of digital medicine and social media at the treatment **delivery** phase.”

In a recent bylined article in [The Hill](#), a newspaper read by members of Congress and their staff, Jim Greenwood, President and CEO of the [Biotechnology Industry Organization](#), offers an idea that could take hold in the spirit of this ember of bipartisanship. His idea includes potential funding for a massive, long-term research study that will involve over 100,000 Americans and examine some of the most devastating diseases, including Alzheimers. Part of the study will be to identify biomarkers common to those who develop the diseases, which will then lead to cures. Once a biomarker is identified, drugs can be developed that hit that biomarker.

Mr. Greenwood, once a member of Congress himself, addressed the Upton-DeGette initiative during the Rare Disease and Orphan Product Breakthrough Summit held by the [National Organization for Rare Disorders](#) that convened in Alexandria, Virginia earlier this week.

Mr. Greenwood pointed out that many scientists have failed to find cures to diseases like Alzheimer's because by the time the patient shows symptoms, the neurological damage is already done. His long-term biomarker study is designed to overcome this hurdle. Greenwood challenged the conference attendees to help think through how this could work to develop cures for rare diseases as well.

The 21st Century Cures Initiative recognizes that innovation is happening at lightning speed. From the mapping of the human genome to the rise of personalized medicines that are linked to advances in molecular medicine, constant breakthroughs are changing the face of disease treatment, management, and cures. Health research is moving quickly, but the federal drug and device approval apparatus is not keeping pace. And when the laws don't keep up with the innovation, we all lose.

Representatives Upton and DeGette recognize that for more lives to be saved, Congress will need to take a comprehensive look at the process of getting drugs to market – from discovery to development to delivery with the simple goal of saving lives. Add Mr. Greenwood's idea into the mix, and we may be able to save billions of dollars that would otherwise go to the long-term treatment of Alzheimer's patients. More importantly, we could save millions of patients and their families the painful loss caused by the disease.

This makes so much sense that not even Congress can disagree. Will you tell your member of Congress to support this bipartisan initiative? What do you think of it?

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