H.R. 6, the 21st Century Cures Act

Arthritis is a chronic, degenerative joint disease with no cure, and for some forms of arthritis, there are no targeted therapeutic treatment options. Increasing research to identify the causes and better treatments for the disease could greatly benefit the more than 50 million adults and children in the United States who suffer from it.

The 21st Century Cures Act, introduced by Reps. Fred Upton (R-MI) and Diana DeGette (D-CO), would accelerate medical research by looking at the full scientific discovery process – from studying clues in basic science, to developing drugs and devices, to medicine delivery and marketing. Below are some key ways this legislation would help people with arthritis:

Discovery of Disease Clues:

- Includes $10 billion in funding for the National Institutes of Health and $550 million for the Food and Drug Administration to carry out additional research and drug approval.
- Supports programs to attract young scientists to the research field, consistent with the Arthritis Foundation’s scientific strategy.
- Includes provisions that would make research findings and health information available to other researchers, which would give them important data about people who suffer from arthritis and related diseases.
- Helps ensure that children are adequately represented in research, an important component of getting new treatments for juvenile arthritis (JA).
- Enhances patient searches for clinical trials, making it easier for people with arthritis to find clinical trials that might help them.

Development of Treatments:

- Includes patient-focused drug development, which would allow the patient’s experience to be a bigger part of the drug development process.
- Requires guidance that would help qualify biomarkers and target therapies, which could greatly benefit people with osteoarthritis, who don’t yet have targeted drugs that can improve their condition.
- Includes a process to facilitate accelerated approval of drugs, ensuring that new drugs for arthritis get to patients sooner.
- Requires guidance to facilitate more open communication by drug manufacturers on off-label uses of drugs (many drugs are used off-label for arthritis, particularly for JA).
Incentivizes drug companies to do research on repurposing drugs for use in rare diseases (there are many rare diseases under the arthritis umbrella, particularly within JA).

Delivery of Treatments to Patients:

- Supports efforts of a congressional working group to expand telehealth services in Medicare; telehealth services could help people with arthritis gain access to physicians they might not otherwise have access to.
- Authorizes Medicare coverage of disposable medical products used in the home (such as syringes and catheters), which aren’t currently covered.
- Improves the process for determining which Medicare treatments are covered, leading to increased access to arthritis treatments for Medicare beneficiaries.
- Allows Medicare beneficiaries to shop around for certain services in order to find the most cost-effective treatments available to them.

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