Prostate cancer task force

The Prostate Cancer Surveillance, Education, Detection and Treatment Act became law at the end of 2015. It is designed to provide the public with information and education to create greater public awareness of the prevalence of and measures available to detect, diagnose and treat prostate cancer and related chronic prostate conditions.

A 19-member task force was created, whose job it is to help ensure that:

- Medical professionals, insurers, patients and governmental agencies are equally knowledgeable about screening, diagnosis and treatment options;
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Joining the compact would increase medical access for Pennsylvanians in underserved areas and connect people with serious illness to specialists.

The following states are members of this compact: Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, Kansas, South Dakota, Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Mississippi, Alabama, West Virginia and New Hampshire.

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The National Institutes of Health reports that many children’s vision problems develop before they reach school age. However, less than 15 percent of all preschool children receive an eye exam, and less than 22 percent of preschool children receive some type of vision screening. Early recognition of eye disorders and disease results in more effective treatment, resulting in saving sight and lives.

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Screening for Hep C

Hepatitis C is the most common blood-borne disease in the U.S. and the leading cause of liver cancer and liver transplants. Unfortunately, Pennsylvania has one of the highest rates of Hepatitis C in the nation.

A new law I voted for requires health care practitioners to offer those born between 1945 and 1965 a Hepatitis C test when receiving services in a hospital or physician’s office. The age range is because the Centers for Disease Control has recommended that anyone born during this 20-year timespan should get tested because 75 percent of those with Hepatitis C do not know it.

Help in recognizing the warning signs of suicide

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, suicide takes nearly 40,000 Americans every year and is the 10th-leading cause of death for all ages in the United States. Veterans in particular are susceptible to suicide. In 2014, roughly 20 veterans a day committed suicide. That equates to 18 percent of all suicides, even though they only make up 9 percent of the population.

For every suicide death, there are 11 attempts. Many of those who attempt suicide never seek professional care.

A new law requires psychologists, social workers, therapists and counselors to have at least one hour of continuing education in the assessment, treatment and management of suicide. This doesn’t increase the hours of training, but simply requires one of the hours to be suicide prevention training.

It’s important to make sure our professionals have the skills to deal with suicide so they can intervene.

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Last session, the General Assembly enacted a law to let schools carry epin pen kits for allergic reactions. As a result, over 2,645 Pennsylvania schools are now participating in a program to receive free epinephrine auto-injectors.

This session, there are plans to expand that law to let summer camps, colleges and universities, restaurants, amusement parks, sport facilities, daycare and other facilities have non-patient-specific epinephrine auto-injectors for emergency situations if they wish to carry them. Training would be required, and there would be liability protection for the trained employee, as well.

Life-threatening food allergies are becoming a large and growing health problem, so access to life-saving medication makes sense.
**Zika and West Nile virus prevention**

West Nile virus is something everyone needs to watch out for when mosquitoes are around, but now there’s also the Zika virus. There are similarities and differences between the two:

**Differences**
- Mosquitoes that spread Zika virus bite mostly during the daytime, while the mosquitoes that spread West Nile bite in the evening to morning.
- Mosquitoes that spread Zika also spread dengue and chikungunya viruses.
- Zika can be spread during sex by a man or woman infected with Zika to his or her sex partners.
- No cases of Zika in Pennsylvania have occurred from locally acquired infections; the only confirmed cases of Zika in Pennsylvania are in people who contracted the virus while visiting areas where the virus is actively spreading.

**Similarities**
- No vaccine exists to prevent Zika or West Nile.
- Both diseases are spread primarily through the bite of an infected mosquito.
- The best way to prevent the disease is to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes.

**Prevention tips**
- Use an EPA-registered insect repellent;
- Do not use light-colored, lightweight, loose-fitting clothing that covers hands, arms, legs and other exposed skin.
- Stay and sleep in air-conditioned or screened rooms or under a mosquito net when outdoors.
- Stay indoors when mosquitoes are most active.
- Empty standing water or turn over items in yards that hold water, such as tires, buckets, planters, pools, bird baths or trash containers.

The Department of Environmental Protection continues to monitor for the presence of mosquitoes associated with Zika transmission and will implement control measures when needed.

**Marriage and family therapist protections**

Act 54 of 2016 protects the title of marriage and family therapists licensed by the State Board of Social Workers. This ensures that only those with a professional license are permitted to call themselves marriage and family therapists in the state.

Only marriage and family therapists are required to receive training in family therapy and family systems, and since they are required to undergo extensive education and training, this protects consumers against fraud and maintains the professionalism of these highly qualified mental health care providers.

**Local police provide drug take-back services**

Please be aware that police and law enforcement units throughout Westmoreland, Armstrong and Indiana counties provide locations where unwanted and unused prescription and over-the-counter medicines can be disposed of properly.

Local departments offering the service include:
- Latrobe Police Dept., 901 Jefferson St., Latrobe; 724-537-5526
- Washington Township Police Dept., 289 Pine Run Church Road, Apollo; 724-727-3410
- Saint Vincent College Dept. of Public Safety, 300 Fraser Purchase Road, Latrobe; 724-805-2186
- Vandergriff Police Dept., 109 Grant Ave., Vandergriff; 724-566-5507
- Apollo Borough Police Dept., 616 First St., Apollo; 724-478-4201
- Kiskiminetas Township Police Dept., 1222 Old State Road, Apollo; 724-478-3357
- Parks Township Police Dept., 26 Jackson St., Vandergriff; 724-567-5525
- Blairsville Borough Police Dept., 201 E. Market St., Blairsville; 724-459-7555

Some restrictions on hours might apply, so calling first is recommended.

More information about the Pennsylvania Prescription Drug Take-Back Program is available on the state Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs’ website, www.ddap.pa.gov.

**Visiting team doctors can treat athletes**

Many teams in Pennsylvania and around the country employ medical personnel who travel with the team and coaches to provide medical care. These team physicians have established medical relationships with the athletes and are well suited to provide care while teams are competing.

Laws have been enacted to allow out-of-state visiting athletic team physicians to treat athletes during athletic events without the need for a Pennsylvania medical license, provided they are licensed in their home state and have an agreement with a sports team to provide care for the team while traveling. There also are restrictions to the time these physicians can practice in Pennsylvania.

**Comprehensive plan for fighting opioid addiction**

Opioid abuse has reached crisis level in Pennsylvania. According to a 2014 state report on heroin, the accidental overdose death rates were much higher in Westmoreland and Armstrong counties, 15.9 and 13.4 deaths per 100,000 people, respectively, than the statewide average of 12.7 deaths per 100,000 people. And, it’s only getting worse.

This crisis is also straining our prisons, and addictions are costing the nation more than $50 billion annually.

I participated in a Westmoreland County roundtable earlier this summer at Saint Vincent College with Gov. Tom Wolf to discuss initiatives in fighting the scourge of opioid addiction and the challenges we face locally and as a state.

Some of us in the General Assembly have taken action on a number of fronts, from giving law enforcement and emergency responders the ability to administer naloxone, the life-saving drug that can reverse opioid overdoses, as well as “good Samaritan” immunity for those responding to and reporting overdoses, to creating a pilot grant program for addiction services at correctional facilities for post-release and relapse-prevention treatments.

In addition, a special session will be called in the fall to specifically address this issue and enact recommendations provided by a task force for easily providing a multi-agency approach to this issue and enact recommendations provided by a task force for easily.

In Pennsylvania we are working hard to understand and fight the scourge of opioid prescription drug abuse, but much more needs to be done.

The following list is some of the legislation being worked on:

- **H.B. 1737** – Would provide for the proper disposal of unused prescriptions and over-the-counter medications to ensure the safety of drinking water and reduce prescription drug abuse. Passed the House, awaits Senate action.
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