

Senate Special Committee on Aging Hearing
"Patients in Peril: Critical Shortages in Geriatric Care"
Testimony by Stephen Bzdok
February 27, 2002

Good morning Chairman Breaux, Ranking Member Craig, Senator Reid, members of the Committee and distinguished guests. It is an honor to be here this morning and I hope that my testimony will be helpful.

My name is Stephen Bzdok and I have been a resident of Las Vegas, Nevada for over forty years. When I was younger, I wasn't really concerned about what kind of doctor I saw. But as I grew older and became ill, I realized that I had to have someone who could understand what my mind and body were going through. That was when I discovered the importance of geriatric medicine.

My health started deteriorating in the summer of 1999 when I started to have seizures. They started out small and I would have about one per week. Then they started to snowball until I was having a seizure every day and then they started multiplying so that I had cluster seizures. I started to panic because I didn't trust myself to drive and I was all alone in my home when I was having these seizures. Each one could last up to 15-20 minutes and I couldn't even drive to the doctor. During my well periods, I asked my friends to drive me to the doctor. By that point, I would go to a quick care center to get medical attention and was constantly shifted from doctor to doctor to doctor. My primary care physician did not have a clue what was happening to me. They assumed it was a brain problem.

In October of 1999, I had a very large seizure while I was at home alone and laid on the living room floor for four days. A friend of mine hadn't heard for me for four days and she sent some friends who had a key to my place to come check on me. They found me on the floor in a fetal position and called an ambulance. I spent 2 ½ months in intensive care hooked up to life support. The doctors at the hospital got a court order to take me off of life support. All of my organs had started to shut down and the doctors put me on a death watch for four days. They even gave away my car, my clothes and all of my personal belongings. My friends and family came to the hospital to say good-bye.

I finally woke up on my own in the hospital room around February 25th, 2000 - 4 ½ months after my friends found me on my living room floor. I had actually slept through the millennium. Doctors still did not know what happened to me.

When I went into the coma, I weighed 220 pounds, and when I woke up from the coma, I weighed 123 pounds and I did not have the use of my legs. The doctors in the hospital started me on physical therapy in the hospital so I could walk again. I was discharged from the hospital on April 6, 2000, when I was strong enough to use a walker. I went from the hospital to a care home. From that point on, the people who owned the care home suggested that I enroll in supplemental insurance and I enrolled in a Medicare Social HMO in Las Vegas. That is when I was introduced to geriatric medicine.

I was assigned to a geriatrician and I will never forget my first visit because it lasted over one hour. He gave me a very thorough physical and asked many questions. I started seeing him on a regular basis and had a standing appointment once every three months.

One year later, I had two seizures. My geriatrician diagnosed my condition as a heart murmur. My geriatrician put me in the hospital immediately and I told him I was having a pain in my back that traveled under my right arm and to the right side of my chest. That is when he called in the heart specialist. Within two days I had a pace maker put in. I was finally receiving treatment for my condition.

It took a geriatrician to diagnose the problem.

My health problems started to turn around after I received geriatric care. Since receiving the pacemaker, my health has improved ten-fold - it is unbelievable. First, I am not having seizures any more and I am able to live on my own. I can take care of all of my own medication and can live a active life again. I used to take 14 pills every morning and now I am down to just 6 pills.

There is nothing my geriatrician can do about my getting older - but he can help me from becoming old. Thank you for your time today. Please feel free to ask me any questions.