**Prescription Information Accessibility Act**

**The Problem**

Pharmacological advances in recent years have resulted in doctors’ prescribing more and more powerful medications for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, COPD, heart abnormalities, and above all pain management, to name a few. These medications have exact and varied dosage instructions: once a week, after meals, six times a day, etc. Moreover, the side-effect warnings are dire: bleeding, thoughts of suicide, sleep-walking, nausea, and the like. The result is that careful and responsible patients and their care-givers must constantly consult the literature that comes with medications.

Considering these truths and the fact that 7,300,000 adult Americans in 2015 identified themselves as having visual impairments, along with the growing aging population, there is a significant percentage of Americans that cannot independently identify their medications or read the literature that comes with them.

The only reliable way of providing accessible paper information about dosage and background information about medications to people with low vision is for someone to put it into large print or Braille. But many visually impaired people cannot read print of any size or contrast, and less than 10 percent of all blind adults read Braille.

For this reason, blind and visually impaired people have no choice but to depend on memory: trying to recall what shape and size their pills are, marking pill bottles with rubber bands and paperclips, and placing medications in various locations. Then they have to try to remember the dosage instructions and their personal systems for telling medications apart. This is so clearly dangerous that many people give up managing their medications or settle for the possibility of making serious, even life-threatening errors. The social cost of this situation is serious and growing. Some people have no choice but to give up their independence for the supervision of nursing homes. The cost of medication errors is incalculable.

In this post-Americans-with Disabilities-Act era of the established right of disabled people to equal access to information, blind people should have the information about their medications that everyone else takes for granted. The right to have full access to medical information is one more manifestation of the right to independence already granted in the Americans with Disabilities Act but not yet available in the real world.

**The Solution**

 Luckily technology advances today provide the needed solutions. The Access Board has developed best practices for providing Braille, large print, and audible prescription information. We believe that making audible prescription information generally available is the best way of solving the equal access problem. Every retail and mail-order pharmacy in Ohio should notify each blind or visually impaired person to whom a drug is dispensed that a prescription reader is available to the person and should provide on request such a label attached to the container that the recipient can read with a device provided by the pharmacy. This device will convey audibly all the information contained on the label.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO**

If you can help us develop this legislation or are interested in sponsoring the bill when it is introduced, contact Sheri Albers, National Federation of the Blind of Ohio Legislative Committee Chair: sheri.albers87@gmail.com or (513) 886-8697.