

STATEMENT OF SENATOR GORDON H. SMITH

U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging
“Person-Centered Care: Reforming Services and Bringing Older Citizens Back to the Heart of
Society”
July 23, 2008

Good morning and thank you all for being here today.

I want to thank Senator Casey for bringing this important issue to the attention of the Committee. As debate continues on health care reform, we often find ourselves embroiled in discussions of cost control and payment reform, and too often forget the people our reforms are intended to serve. The recent debate over this year’s Medicare legislation was an excellent example of how we can make necessary policy adjustments while improving the Medicare program for our seniors.

I look forward to today’s discussion as it is keeping with this positive trend of placing the care of the person at the center of health care policy decisions.

We have an impressive list of witnesses today, all of whom will share with us their perspective on person-centered care. I want to extend a personal welcome to Dr. Diana White who flew all the way from Oregon to be with us today. Dr. White will share with us some of the initiatives going on in Oregon and provide recommendations garnered from lessons learned.

I am personally very proud of Oregon’s system of health care. We have a large number of community-based care choices including home care, hospice and other service. The diversity in care options and our state’s continued emphasis on providing a variety of services has supplied Oregonians with one of the nation’s best health care systems. The Oregon model has a strong collaborative philosophy and is designed to get individuals the appropriate care in the setting that best meets their needs.

Oregon’s system lends itself in many ways to the philosophy of person-centered care. Similarly, person-centered care focuses on the inherent value of each individual and emphasizes the importance in relationships between caretakers and receivers.

As we look for new ways to provide quality care for our seniors, examining concepts and philosophies, like the ones discussed today, will help us all make informed decisions. Our seniors deserve the very best. If we can design public policies that maximize choice, autonomy and relationships between caregiver and receiver, I believe this can go a long way in helping to improve the quality and dignity of care our seniors receive.

I am committed to looking at all alternatives that will help our dedicated health professionals in providing the highest quality of care to their patients. To that extent, I welcome the opportunity to learn more about “person-centered care” and the potential contributions it could hold in providing improved quality and increased satisfaction of seniors in outpatient and long-term care settings.

With that, I turn to Senator Casey.