Montana
HealthCare
ASSOCIATION

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EXHIBIT 2 HUA
DATE 2-11-09
HB HJ 17

HJ 17
STUDY USE OF MEDICATION AIDES IN NURSING HOMES

Nursing homes in Montana are experiencing a shortage of licensed nursing staff. The shortage is even more prevalent in our most rural communities. Facilities are turning to agencies who supply traveling nurses to staff uncovered shifts. This is not only expensive but can affect the quality of care because residents are being cared for by nurses who are not familiar with them. The shortage will worsen as the baby boomers continue to age and seek health care services.

The administration of medications is a very time-consuming process in nursing homes and is done only by licensed nurses. However, to help address the shortage of licensed nurses, many states have developed a program of education, training and certification to allow certified nursing assistants (CNA's) to become medication aides to administer medications in nursing homes.

The establishment of this level of health care worker could have the added benefits of improving the quality of care of nursing home residents by taking pressure off licensed nurses to allow more time for assessment and other complex nursing functions, by having medication aides who know the residents administer medications instead of using traveling nurses who are not familiar with the residents, and by improving retention and recruitment of CNA's through a career ladder approach.

Establishing such a program should be done carefully and with the involvement and assistance of those involved in regulating nursing homes and in regulating medication aides as well as nursing homes, nurses, consumers and advocacy groups. In October 2008 the Board of Nursing voted unanimously to support a study of this issue.

HJ 17 is a study resolution requesting DPHHS to work in cooperation with the Board of Nursing and other stakeholders to examine the use of medication aides in nursing homes and to report to the 2011 Legislature. The study will look at the programs of other states and determine what qualifications, education, supervision, restrictions and licensing is necessary for the safe and effective use of medication aides. This is an important issue and the study will give the 2011 legislature valuable information it will need to determine whether to approve the use of medication aides in nursing homes.

Please support HJ 17.

Rose M. Hughes, Executive Director
January 2009