A recent one was from researchers who claim they can spot Alzheimer’s by giving a simple 10-word test. Others state that perhaps even early signs of forgetfulness may be a sign of the disease. And so on. Until there’s a huge additional amount of controlled research on these theories, I think these claims are ridiculous, and potentially damaging…and may even be going against certain laws involving discrimination against disabilities.

And a bigger problem may be that every senior is now going to think they’re getting Alzheimer’s if they forget where they put the car keys, or they can’t remember 10 words. I can think of a lot of things that could cause a person not to be able to remember 10 words: test stress, distractions, a host of medical problems such as Attention Deficit Disorder, various learning disabilities, and who knows what all!

For example, I was recently put through the “third degree” when I applied for long-term care insurance.

A nurse for a very large insurance company called me on the phone and held a 20-minute, intense interview obviously to check out my cognitive abilities. There were all kinds of idiotic questions, math quizzes, and what-have-you. And a part of it was a “word recall” test.

It takes quite a bit of arrogance to think you can diagnose someone in the early stages of Alzheimer’s from a phone call. Some people simply flip out when they have to talk on the phone. And there’s the stress of it all. (As a journalist, I’m used to interviewing over the phone, but this call even had me stressed out.)

Some of the questions were math quizzes… and I’ve always thought I had some type of math learning disability, but there I was, trying to answer math questions over the phone to prove that I wasn’t in the early stages of Alzheimer’s! (I passed the thing okay, but it wasn’t fun and was more or less ridiculous in my opinion.)

I think some of these kinds of things should be illegal, especially without much more proof that they’re accurate, and don’t discriminate against people with various disabilities, which I believe they certainly could in some instances.

And: do they accurately distinguish between the many types of cognitive diseases, some of which are curable? I doubt it, without lots of further research.

Anyhow, if the 10-word recall test passes a decade of double-blind studies that take into account all kinds of other factors, I’ll believe it. Same with the dozens of other so-called research reports I get about this disease.

Until then, we’ll still report what the researchers have to say, but it’ll clearly be “caveat emptor.” Let the buyer beware!