

## Mike Sportiello Testimony New York Health Act

I have the privilege of serving as a clinic coordinator for the University of Rochester clinic for the uninsured right here in Rochester.

A few weeks ago, I had a woman without insurance sit me down and tell me her story. We'll call her Kayla. She had a number of serious health conditions requiring many expensive medications. She was barely able to walk and required assistance just to sit down. After telling me her medical history, she told me that other doctors and clinics had refused to even see her because they doubted she could be helped without a long term primary care physician managing her. When I told her that we'd be happy to see her, but it would be a three hour wait, she took my hands and with a face gratitude thanked me over and over and over. You see, this would be Kayla's first meaningful interaction with the health care system in years because she was uninsured and didn't qualify for Medicaid.

In the same clinic, we administered a test for tuberculosis to three patients. I inject a little liquid in their arm, and if 48 hours later their arm is red, it means they have tuberculosis. I tried to send them to the Monroe County Department of Health to have them read, a process which takes literally seconds of time. "Those aren't our patients," they told me, "so we aren't going to read them." So then I called a University of Rochester clinic that serves patients with insurance. "Those aren't our patients," they told me, "so we aren't going to read them." I picked a fight with them. "Yes they are. I work for a University of Rochester clinic, and operate with the same doctors you all do. They are our patients," but no matter how I explained it, I was stonewalled: you see, what determines whether or not you receive adequate care isn't whether or not you need care, it's whether or not you got a thick enough wallet to cover your expenses. If these patients aren't our patients, then whose the hell are they?

I have another patient I want to tell you about. Let's call her Jenni. She has insurance. She is a little girl with short pigtails, the kind that bob up and down as she walks into the room. The first time I met her she was wearing pink rain boots even though it was dry outside, probably because she loved the color. On her shirt was a picture of one of the ugliest dogs you've ever seen, so ugly it was cute you know? That visit we talked to her father. He told us that it was just him and his children at home, their mother out of the picture. He worked full time at a job with benefits and provided for his kids the best he could, the best anyone could, and when he got off he helped them with homework and fed them and ran the house hold, all alone. Since this girl's mom left, she had been acting up in class and flunking her tests. She wasn't able to fall asleep at night either. She needed help. She needed counseling. Her teacher thought so. Her guidance counselor thought so. Her principal thought so. Her doctor thought so. But you know who didn't think so? Her insurance company. And in the end, that's all that matters. Because that little girl, who looked so happy from the outside, continues to manifest her complex emotions and anxiety in ways that are detrimental to herself and her fellow classmates. She still hasn't been to a counselor. Her family can't afford it, and her health insurance won't cover it. I hope the few hundred bucks the insurance company made off this little girl goes to good use, along with the \$540,000 raise Excellus' CEO got this last year to bring his final salary to just under \$3,000,000. I hope he sleeps well at night, because I know for a fact that this little girl Jenni doesn't.

I'm also not a great sleeper. This was one of the first things my friend Owen noticed about me when he moved back to Rochester last summer. But later, other signs of my depression became more clear. I wasn't eating. My smiles seemed fake. I wasn't interested or

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passionate about anything more: seeing my friends, reading books, anything. I went, in the course of a summer, from loving my life, to grasping at any emotion that wasn't just a dark emptiness. Owen noticed before anyone else. And soon my friends and Rohith, Anne, Mahima, and David caught on too. You see those four people may have just saved my life. They got me to a mental health counselor, and because of my job in the health field, I got fast tracked to see one because our rates of suicide are so high in the medical field. Because of the concern the University of Rochester has for its health care students and workers committing suicide, they made sure the visits had no copay and no deductible. It is no exaggeration to say that my no deductible health insurance saved my life.

I didn't kill myself that summer. I made it through. And today I feel much better. But it's not difficult to imagine someone with the same thoughts in their head that I had that works at a law firm. Or a McDonald's. Or a school. Anywhere with a high deductible plan with large copays.

Normally, when someone dies, we have these moments of silence for them. The for profit health insurance system hasn't killed Kayla yet. And it hasn't gotten to Jenny either. I'm still standing today before you. But rest assured, every day in this county and in this state, parents are burying their children and holding moments of silence, remembering the moments they used to put them on their shoulders and dance around the family room playing the music too loud. Children bury their parents remembering the first football game they watched together.

During my moment of silence, my children will know that I missed their baseball game for a reason. That I was late to pick them up for school because I was helping a patient in the hospital. What will your children think? Will they know why you all miss their games? Will they say "Mom was the one who bucked leadership and made sure that families could actually afford their insulin"? Or will they just tell themselves it was because their Dad was a Senator and be unable to elaborate? Will they tell themselves their mom was gone because she was busy "fighting for the middle class," whatever the hell that even means?

You all have a decision to make. For your daughters. For your sons. For Kayla. For Jenni. For me. Pass the New York Health Act. Give us something to think about during your moment of silence.