

Mahima Iyengar, Third Year Medical Student, University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry

My name is Mahima Iyengar, and I am a current medical student down the street at the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry, and I'd like to share a story with you.

It was 3 AM.

We walked up to the family waiting area and found over 15 people waiting for us. We had spent the last 5 hours performing surgeries. Removing a spleen. Drilling a hole in his head to give his brain room to swell. Sewing up gashes that went down to the bone. He was not out of the woods yet and we went to go tell his family his status. It had been 5 hours and they had not even seen him yet because he was still being sewn back together.

We sat and talked to them. Told them that it wasn't looking good. Even though we had stopped massive internal bleeding, his brain damage was so severe he may never be the same young man he had been before. We answered question after question from his family and friends about what his life would look like.

And then his mother stopped us to ask - "Can we talk to a social worker?"

We told her that the social worker would not be in until 9AM and asked what we could do for her. She told us, "He has really terrible insurance. He's not going to be able to afford this and we aren't going to be able to afford this and we need to figure out this soon."

How awful is it that a grieving mother, being told just hours earlier that her son had been in a car accident, and then having to find out that he had irreparable brain damage and would most likely never regain consciousness, would have to ask us this question? Instead of being able to grieve she was forced to think about insurance policies and billing and deductibles.

This is what I have been thinking about recently because I am one day away from finishing 2 months on a trauma surgery rotation and the things that I have seen everyday are horrific, and yet things that could happen to any one of us at any moment. A car being t-boned. Falling down stairs. Not wearing a helmet.

Yes, this story is tragic, but I don't want you to hear this and think that only stories of horrific tragedy like this deserve our attention and compassion.

The story of a patient who hasn't been to a dentist in years and is putting it off unless they have tooth pain, because of dental insurance is hard to come by. That story horrifies me.

When a patient asks if we can just prescribe one hypertension medication, do they really need the second one? That horrifies me.

The patient who I am seeing in the ED with a terrible foot ulcer from uncontrolled diabetes, and who *has* insurance, but doesn't go to their primary care doctor because of copays. That story horrifies me as well.

I don't want to practice in a system where GoFundMe is an important payor of healthcare expenses. I don't want to practice in a system where healthcare bills are the number one cause of personal bankruptcy in the US. Younger doctors and those who will be entering practice in the next few years, like myself support Medicare for All bills for good reason. I would love to eventually practice in a state where patients can afford the care I prescribe, where stories like the one I shared are part of the past, and not common occurrence.

This is an urgent issue for me. I'm asking for you to pass the NY Health Act, for NY state to become a leader in creating an equitable and compassionate health care system.