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# PAUL LANGEVIN: LIVES DEPEND ON HEALTH CARE ACCOUNTABILITY

COMMENTARY

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12 COMMENTS

*This commentary is by Paul Langevin of Johnson.*

**O**n Jan. 23, 2014, my wife Jeanette died of cancer. She was first diagnosed with thyroid cancer back in 2008. We were fortunate to have comprehensive health insurance at the time, and Jeanette responded well to treatment. Her cancer went into remission, and everything was great.

Then 15 months ago Jeanette came down with a chronic cough. She went to the doctor, and was told that she may have allergies. Looking for a second opinion, she went back to the oncologist who had treated her thyroid cancer and got X-rayed and tested. The news was terrible: Jeanette had advanced Stage 4 cancer that had spread to almost all of her internal organs.

*People like Jeanette are being denied tests and treatments every day not for medical reasons, but because they can't afford*

We battled with our insurance company, Blue Cross Blue Shield, to get the chemotherapy pills Jeanette needed. They denied payment for the pills five times, saying that they needed to find the cheapest vendor. Finally, on the day Jeanette died, the pills arrived. They were tossed onto our deck and left sitting in 20-below-zero temperatures.

*the cost of care, and yet nobody – not insurance companies, not hospitals, and not the State of Vermont – is being held accountable for patients' rights and patients' health.*

Losing my wife of 34 years is one of the most painful things I've ever experienced, but it was made much worse by the battles Jeanette and I had over insurance and by the lingering questions over whether Jeanette might have survived or lived more comfortably if she'd gotten the right test and treatments. After Jeanette died, I asked her doctor why they'd done no testing during her remission to detect any growth of cancer beyond her thyroid. I was informed that testing was "cost prohibitive" and may not provide conclusive results.

Let me be clear: prioritizing cost containment over patient care is in no way acceptable. Jeanette was a human being with the right to access the health care she needed. We should all be ashamed and aghast that Vermont's market-based health care system denies people access to care unless they are wealthy.

I cannot say for certain whether earlier testing would have saved Jeanette's life, but I have to think that the lack of accountability in the health care system played a role in her death. People like Jeanette are being denied tests and treatments every day not for medical reasons, but because they can't afford the cost of care, and yet nobody – not insurance companies, not hospitals, and not the State of Vermont – is being held accountable for patients' rights and patients' health.

With universal, publicly financed health care, this would be turned on its head. Instead of cost containments and profits determining the care that patients get, patients' care would be based on their health care needs regardless of their ability to pay. We'd pay to support our health care system as we are able through equitable taxes, and each and every member of our families and communities would get the health care they need.

I ask that you, the reader, consider this letter with an eye towards objectivity and human decency. Health Care is a Human Right. We are all in need of the highest standards of health care and a system accountable to the patient. Our legislators must pass equitable health care financing, and we need to hold them accountable.