

## Reform health to care

Written by Barbara Milon, Executive Director, Phyllis Wheatley Community Center  
Monday, 19 October 2009 16:39

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One of the most difficult experiences by a family with a(n) aging parent(s) is the prospect or need for medical care that is so serious that surgery is recommended. This becomes all the more complicated by a family when most of them do not live in the same city as the aging parent. I support wholeheartedly health care reform, because I believe that everyone is entitled health care and information. Increasingly I am convinced that a public option is necessary. I am very troubled by what our family is experiencing.

Our mom, now our only parent up and until this year, was hospitalized suddenly. One of my brothers, who does not live in the city where mom resides, dropped everything including his duties as a businessman, father, etc., and drove home to be with mom. Our mother was hospitalized for about five days. One of the requests made by my brother is for a meeting with the surgeon and mom's medical doctor. My brother thought that this was agreed to and showed up the next morning at 8am only to find out that the doctors were there around 6 am. My brother did get to speak to the medical doctor, but not the surgeon.

My role was to be one of the family points of contact support communications to my siblings. There are seven of us. In one of the emails I recommended to my brother that the doctors should be asked to coordinate and review all of her medical information. So this is point one.

On another point, my brother requested that all the medical tests needed for mom be completed while mom was in the hospital. Mom is 82-years-old, my brother lives out of town and this seemed to be a reasonable request - point two. Getting back to the busy surgeon, point one, my brother decided the best way to communicate with the busy surgeon was to email him questions since his efforts to meet with him were to no avail, including scheduling a second time to meet with him. This second meeting was cancelled about five minutes before the scheduled meeting. In addition to my brother directly sending an email to the surgeon with our questions, I asked my brother if he had communicated to a nurse or someone in the doctor's office who might be able to help or facilitate getting the questions answered.

Point three my brother requested that all tests be conducted on our mother before she left the hospital and this did not happen. After mom was discharged from the hospital and my brother left to return to his home another test was requested and scheduled. This test was extremely painful for mom. There was no medication prior to the test which involved a diagnostic instrument inserted in her nose in order to examine her stomach and chest area. This was very traumatic because of mom's age, and what she had already experienced. Frankly she already has made up in her mind that she does not want surgery.

In regards to the busy surgeon and the email questions, point two, and the request for more information there has been no reply and we have not heard from the surgeon. My brother, who fortunately lives in a major Midwest city, will follow up with the health care provider to determine if they will pay for mom to have a second opinion by a specialist and at one of the medical facilities where he lives.

You see, under mom's medical coverage's visits to a gastroenterologist at the hospital are not covered. I spoke to someone who works in the field of health care to determine recommendations on getting a response from the surgeon. Interestingly, she said vascular surgeons never, or rarely, respond because they are so busy. I know this cannot be true for all

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surgeons, yet I wonder how surgeons deal with medical situations when their mom or a love one is facing a health concern and a recommendation for surgery. I just attended the Hamline University School of Law health law forum on healthcare reform; it was a non partisan program. I learned many things about the multiplicity and complex issues related to health care reform including that providers do not pay for medical coordination.

As an executive director of a non profit organization I know with certainty that our government responds to the public, someone will have to give you an answer. I also know as an executive director that we do have accountability standards. I also know that the delivery of services is a professional quality that both non profits and for profits aspire to provide in a manner that is respectable, and responsive.

Our mom is the only parent my brothers and sisters and I have; and I know change must happen. I support our President and Congress for working on our behalf to make health care reform change now – “a step forward is better than no step at all.”