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She wants medicine to be less of a pain

BY GLORIA LaBOUNTY SUN CHRONICLE STAFF
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MANSFIELD - Lisa Nash's odyssey through the health care quagmire began in 2001 with what she thought was only a sprained ankle.

She had injured her ankle before, and thought it would simply heal. But when it didn't, a doctor misdiagnosed her pain as Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy, a condition she would have for the rest of her life.

After five years of failed attempts to control the sometimes excruciating pain with drugs and therapy, Nash finally found a doctor who dismissed the prior diagnosis and made one that turned out to be accurate.

What Nash actually had was a trapped nerve that ended up being corrected by a chiropractor.

Now healthy and pain-free, Nash is determined to speak out so others won't go through the same kind of suffering.

In a briefing at the Statehouse today, Nash, a resident of Mansfield, will be featured in a short film and will also tell her story in person, all in support of a bill that would address some of the problems she sees in the health care industry.

Promoted by Health Care for All, a statewide non-profit organization based in Boston, the bill is aimed at improving transparency in health care, and at encouraging partnerships between consumers and providers.

Its key provisions would require hospitals to reduce and report infection rates, to report events like surgical errors, to convene patient and family councils and to establish rapid response teams.

Deborah Wachenhein, consumer health quality coordinator for Health Care for All, said today's briefing will serve as a reminder of the importance of the bill, which was filed a year ago and is still under review by the legislative committee on public health.

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"We are trying to keep the pressure on," Wachenhein said. "The bill needs to move."

Speakers at the briefing will include the lead sponsors of the bill, state Sen. Richard Moore, D-Uxbridge, and Rep. Denise Provost, D-Somerville, plus Nash and two other members of Health Care for All's Consumer Health Quality Council whose stories will also be told in short films.

The council consists of 40 Massachusetts residents who have had problems with health care and are now advocating for change. Washenhein said their stories are being told in newsletters, on Web sites, and now in videos that can be distributed to other legislators and to the media.

The current bill has some points that relate to Nash's experiences, but she wants even more issues addressed in the next bill the organization hopes to file.

"This isn't the end," Nash said. "It's just the beginning of changes that need to happen."

She is acutely aware of the issues after spending four years searching for cures to what she describes as unbearable nerve pain that went up the entire right side of her body. The strongest narcotics didn't bring relief as Nash went from doctor to doctor, seeking yet another opinion but finding that doctors are usually reluctant to disagree with the conclusions of their colleagues.

Finally, she found a doctor who did not look at the diagnoses of others but instead came up with her own determination that Nash in fact had a trapped nerve. Then a chiropractor made the same determination and said he could cure the condition by moving the bones around in her foot, but warned her the procedure would hurt so much it would make her cry.

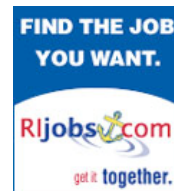
Nash went for it, and 10 days later her pain was gone.

But her story wasn't over.

In April 2007, her 14-year-old daughter was hit by a lacrosse stick, and was later treated by a doctor who quickly concluded that the teen had the symptoms of Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy, even though more extensive X-rays had not even been taken.

"How dare he jump to that conclusion," said Nash, who knew only too well what that diagnosis would mean.

So she took her daughter to a chiropractor and a hand surgeon, who both diagnosed the condition as a bone bruise requiring only a cast to heal. Three weeks later, the cast was off and she was fine.



Today's Front Page



The dual set of experiences prompted Nash to get involved with Health Care for All after reading about the organization on the Internet.

While she agrees with the key provisions of the current bill, Nash wants even more to be done to fix a health care system that she says is broken.

Currently, she said, health insurance companies require that doctors make a diagnosis before a patient's bills will be paid, and that forces doctors to sometimes jump to conclusions too quickly.

"We need to change the system so the insurance companies do not make the rules," she said.

She also wants the medical profession to be more open to alternative methods of treatment like chiropractic care, and she wants doctors who are asked for a second opinion to not consider the diagnosis of the first doctor, so the case will get a fresh review.

The changes won't alter what happened to her, but Nash said she is determined that her story not be repeated.

"I am so driven to prevent this from happening to anyone else," she said. "Every day when I wake up and do not feel intense, horrible pain, you have no idea how miraculous that is. There are no words."

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