

Bill questions hospital care

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Boston -

Jamie Stevenson of Waltham was 16 when doctors misdiagnosed two broken bones as a case of tendonitis. It took six months before the right assessment was made.

Yesterday, Stevenson, now 27, appeared before the Joint Committee on Public Health to endorse a bill that sponsors say will help reduce such errors by making patients and doctors partners in care, while also requiring more detailed reports on hospital infections and misdiagnoses.

"The bill is really about openness, honesty and truth telling in health care," said Stevenson, who appeared on a panel with members of the Consumer Health Quality Council, a part of the organization Health Care For All.

The proposed legislation called for six provisions including the reduction of hospital-acquired infections, including regular hospital reports on infection rates.

Rep. Peter Koutoujian, D-Waltham, co-chairman of the committee, added his own endorsement. "This bill will unquestionably save lives as well as valuable health care dollars," he said.

Koutoujian said according to federal figures, medical errors are a leading cause of death in the nation, more than automobile accidents, breast cancer or AIDS. "These cases are entirely preventable," Koutoujian said.

The legislation is sponsored by Sen. Richard Moore, D-Uxbridge, and Rep. Denise Provost, D-Somerville, who also testified at the hearing.

Moore said of all the parts to the proposal, the focus of the legislation is to get serious about infections in health care settings. Provost added that infections from hospitals have human repercussions as well as being costly to the health care system.

Virginia Harvey, a 47-year-old Somerville resident and member of the Consumer Health Quality Council, shared her story of how she broke her ankle and developed a staph infection from ankle surgery.

After four years and 28 surgeries, she made the decision to have doctors amputate her leg.

When Harvey thought she was clean of the staph infection, she found she had an aneurysm from a long-term infection. After brain surgery, she was left without vision in her right eye.

A supporter of the legislation, Harvey said, "Let's turn this pain into something positive."

The legislation would require hospitals to notify patients of adverse medical events, allow hospitals to apologize to patients without threat of the apology being used in a lawsuit, establish patient and family councils and rapid response teams that would be available to patients who need immediate attention.

