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Bitter Pill: Why Medical Bills Are Killing Us

By Steven Brill | Feb. 20, 2013

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1. Routine Care, Unforgettable Bills

When Sean Recchi, a 42-year-old from Lancaster, Ohio, was told last March that he had non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, his wife Stephanie knew she had to get him to MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. Stephanie's father had been treated there 10 years earlier, and she and her family credited the doctors and nurses at MD Anderson with extending his life by at least eight years.

Because Stephanie and her husband had recently started their own small technology business, they were unable to buy comprehensive health insurance. For \$469 a month, or about 20% of their income, they had been able to get only a policy that covered just \$2,000 per day of any hospital costs. "We don't take that kind of discount insurance," said the woman at MD Anderson when Stephanie called to make an appointment for Sean.

Stephanie was then told by a billing clerk that the estimated cost of Sean's visit — just to be examined for six days so a treatment plan could be devised — would be \$48,900, due in advance. Stephanie got her mother to write her a check. "You do anything you can in a situation like that," she says. The Recchis flew to Houston, leaving Stephanie's mother to care for their two teenage children.

About a week later, Stephanie had to ask her mother for \$35,000 more so Sean could begin the treatment the doctors had decided was urgent. His condition had worsened rapidly since he had arrived in Houston. He was "sweating and shaking with chills and pains," Stephanie recalls. "He had a large mass in his chest that was ... growing. He was panicked."

Nonetheless, Sean was held for about 90 minutes in a reception area, she says, because the hospital could not confirm that the check had cleared. Sean was allowed to see the doctor only after he advanced MD Anderson \$7,500



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Maddie sospetta che sia stata seguita e prende la situazione nelle sue mani. La squadra cerca di aiutare un diplomatico del Medio Oriente quando l'individuo è avvelenato. 39924faeca

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