

Families should come before corporate profits

Written by By Jeanise B. Livingston Gallup
Friday, 19 March 2021 04:15



What should have been a routine laparoscopic surgery to remove my gallbladder, changed my life. Forever. That's why I'm speaking out about the need for the Legislature to pass a law to put patients before healthcare corporations.

When I went in for my operation, the surgeon made a mistake. He misidentified—and then severed—one of the ducts coming out of my liver. But we didn't know that at the time.

I went from the operating room to the intensive care unit and then back to the operating room for emergency surgery. No one knew what was wrong.

They opened me back up and cleaned out at least four liters of digestive fluid that had spilled into my body cavity. They discovered the severed duct and hooked up my liver to a draining tube. After surgery, I was in a coma for about two weeks and my family was on an emotional roller coaster. I ended up on a ventilator. My family didn't know if I would ever come home again.

Finally, I woke up. I had a row of staples 12 inches long down my abdomen. A huge scar remains.

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Because of the original surgeon's error, I had to have my internal organs reconstructed. It took months for me to recover. But my life has never returned to normal.

Even though everything was reconstructed, my liver is permanently and severely damaged. The devastation caused by that surgeon's mistake puts me at continual risk for liver failure and needing a full liver transplant.

To this day I have to go back to the hospital every three months to get lab work done to check my liver. But, due to COVID, the appointments have not been regular. In fact, I have my appointments over the phone now because I am still scared to go to the hospital to get my labs.

When I go to my appointments, the doctor always tells me to look out for signs that my liver is giving me problems. I appreciate the reminders, but I don't need them. I have to live with this fear daily. And my husband and children look out for the signs as well.

This is not the family I knew before I went in to have my gallbladder removed. We're all so serious now. We live with fear. We worry about the liver transplant that I am sure to need one day.

The worst part for me is that I am not as strong as I was before. I feel weak all the time. I want to be the healthy, energetic mother that my kids deserve.

And I'm not alone. Too many New Mexicans—people right here in McKinley County – are harmed every year by hospital negligence and medical error.

New Mexico has a Patient Compensation Fund to help patients like me, who, due to medical malpractice, have suffered harm and need expensive care for the rest of their lives. That fund can't fix a liver or ease a child's fear about their mom's health, but it can help patients move forward. Unfortunately, a backroom deal made several years ago allows multi-billion healthcare corporations to manipulate the Patient Compensation Fund, so that hospitals are not held accountable, leaving injured patients to figure out the care they need on their own.

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This year the New Mexico Legislature has a chance to fix this problem. HB 75 will protect the Patient Compensation Fund and ensure that it is used to actually help patients—not to shield corporate hospitals.

HB 75 has already passed the New Mexico House of Representatives. It is now in the Senate. I urge our McKinley County state Senators to vote for this important bill so that it can go on to the governor to become law.

In New Mexico, we value family. Passing HB 75 will show New Mexico families that we are valued—and that we are more important to our elected officials than faceless healthcare corporations.

By Jeanise B. Livingston
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