



Case Report

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The Case of Theresa S. An undocumented Immigrant with Lung Cancer

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Introduction

With soaring health care costs in the United States, the added burden of assisting people who do not legally live in the United States can be overwhelming to health care providers and institutions. For unauthorized immigrants (also known as undocumented or illegal immigrants), few options are available through the Affordable Care Act (ACA), usually limited to emergency services, charity care, or community health centers. Senate Republicans are working hard to repeal the ACA with revising the Senate Better Care Reconciliation Act (BCRA) that would ultimately limit eligibility for some benefits that immigrants have under the current law.

Theresa S. is a forty-year old female who presented to an Urgent Care in Texas with a sore throat and cough which had persisted for three weeks with no relief of her symptoms using over the counter (OTC) medications. She currently does not smoke tobacco but was a 30 pack per year smoker for three years and quit smoking at age 31. She has had second hand smoke exposure her entire life. She does not know her immunization status. Through testing, metastatic lung cancer was discovered. She does not have health insurance and does not make minimum wage. She cannot get public assistance because she is in the United States, illegally.

If you are wondering what might happen to Theresa or others like her, you're not alone. She does not have a social security number which would likely help her get public assistance for her medical costs. It has cost Theresa S. and her family their entire, modest life savings to come to the United States and they have lived here for three years. Theresa and her family are reluctant to return to Mexico. Theresa's case is not uncommon.

According to [1] there are 11 million illegal immigrants living in the United States 5.6 million of the 11 million illegal immigrants are from Mexico [2]. According to [3]"8.1 million of undocumented immigrants are willing to work which composes 5.1% of the United

States work force...roughly leaving policy makers guessing on the implications for a wide range of proposals—from offering such workers a path to citizenship to kicking them out of the country" (p.2).

Coverage restrictions for immigrants will continue under health care reform proposals however in both the revised BCRA and The American Health Care Association (AHCA) Bills, specific changes are in the language used in the ACA that will ultimately limit eligibility for some benefits that immigrants have had under the current law (NCSL, 2017). Undocumented immigrants will continue to be barred from enrolling in Medicaid or subsidies to purchase coverage.

According to [4] "In 2012, California spent over \$600 million on emergency room and other health-related services for people living in the state illegally" (p.2). Though it increases access to Medicaid and private health insurance, the law bars millions of undocumented immigrants. On June 02, 2015, The California Senate voted to allow unauthorized immigrants to buy health insurance on a state exchange created under the U. S. ACA, a measure that would make the state the first to offer that kind of coverage. On October 09, 2015, California became the largest state in the nation to provide health care to all children, regardless of their immigration status, under a law signed by Gov. Jerry Brown. The Health for All Kids Act, Senate Bill 4, was sponsored by Sen. Ricardo Lara, D-Long Beach. It opened up health coverage to undocumented immigrants by expanding Medi-Cal coverage, making California the state with the largest immigrant population to implement such a policy. New York, Illinois, Washington, Massachusetts and Washington D.C. have also implemented similar policies [5].

There are many arguments supporting insurance coverage for undocumented immigrants. One argument is that illegal immigrants are willing to work jobs that others are not. According to [3] "men

in the U.S. illegally are more likely to work than their native-born counterparts, and they're willing to take jobs pretty much regardless of how much or little they get paid, new research from Harvard University finds" (p. 2). Health care costs for everyone can be reduced by providing preventive services such as immunizations for undocumented children and medical care to undocumented individuals who have communicable diseases. We can close our eyes and look the other way however the issue will not go away rather this issue is here to stay.

Acknowledgement

None.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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