

Subject: My Story

I would like to share my story about my struggle with mental illness and alcoholism. Last year I suffered an emotional collapse. I was diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder and was struggling with alcoholism. I was suicidal and had engaged in self directed violence (cutting). I desperately needed help and I knew it but did not know where to turn. It turned out to be a nightmare. Never before have I ever been more embarrassed, humiliated, or treated with such indifference by medical professionals. I have never had so much as a traffic ticket but you would have thought I was a dangerous criminal by the way I was treated by law enforcement personnel. Why? It was only because I was diagnosed with a mental illness. People who suffer from psychiatric issues need help, understanding, and compassion. We also need affordable and accessible treatment options.

I can honestly say that until last year I cared little for the plight of those with mental illness and/or substance abuse issues. That was until I suffered an emotional collapse. Between May and October 2007 I was committed to psychiatric facilities seven times under the Baker Act. The reason I was hospitalized so many times was that my insurance would only authorize the mandatory three day stay. Getting additional days was difficult. My doctors never felt that I was ready to go home but had no choice but to discharge me. I decided to enter a 30 day residential treatment program and paid \$10,000 out of pocket because the treatment was not covered by insurance. I have been able to stay out of the hospital since October but now I am faced with discontinuation of individual therapy treatment because I have used up the days authorized by the insurance company. My visits to my psychiatrist and my therapist require a co-pay and coinsurance. My hospital stays were not entirely covered by insurance either. The cost of treatment has left me with \$9,000 in unpaid medical bills and there are more bills to come.

It is important to understand that I have always been a productive individual with a successful career in business and education. I work full time as a professor of business and technology. I pay for private insurance through my employer. I have a PhD. Financially; I fall into the category of affluent.

I never imagined this could happen to me. I am fortunate enough to have financial resources. While it isn't pleasant, I am able to pay my medical bills. I am more concerned, though, about what will happen if I am no longer able to see my therapist because of the insurance rules. I am far from better but feel able to cope without hospitalization with his help. Isn't that far less expensive overall? Without that help I may not be able to return to a full, productive life. What will the cost be then?