

February 9, 2009

600 Arbutus Street
Middletown, CT 06457

Dear Senator Maynard and Representative Orange:
Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Re: CT needs the Office of the Health Care Advocate

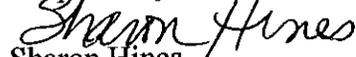
My name is Sharon Hines and I am an oncology nurse practitioner. For more than 30 years I have advocated for people with cancer as they struggle to live with a life changing, and for many, a life threatening illness. In April 2008, out of the blue, I was diagnosed with Stage IV lung cancer. After the shock and disbelief eased, I knew my knowledge and experience would help me in the most difficult challenge of my lifetime.

And then the nightmare started. I was stunned when my insurance carrier denied a treatment that was recommended by both my local oncologist and my Boston oncologist, Dr. J. Paul Marcoux, the Medical Director for Thoracic Oncology at Dana Farber Cancer Institute. The treatment was FDA approved for patients with advanced lung cancer. Adding Avastin to my chemotherapy regimen could extend my survival and the time to progression of my disease. An appeal was submitted by my oncologist to the insurance carrier with supporting data. Once again they denied the treatment. The anguish, despair and anger I and my family felt was crushing. I could not comprehend that the insurance company had the right to deny treatment that was a standard of care. And suddenly, it wasn't the cancer that was to be the biggest battle of my life, it was the insurance company.

I was fortunate to be directed to the Office of the Healthcare Advocate (OHA). With their unending guidance and support, an external appeal was filed. In a matter of days I found out the external reviewer had reversed the decision made by the insurance company. I would be able to get the drug. It is now more than 6 months since that time. My cat scan 2 weeks ago was stable. I feel well and have an excellent quality of life.

I ask our legislators to seriously consider the consequences of eliminating the OHA. As my case demonstrates, the insurance company was misguided and uninformed. Over the years I have seen so many patients and families who were too overwhelmed, too sick, or too intimidated to take on their insurance company. The OHA is there when people are at their most vulnerable. In some cases, it may be a matter of life or death. These are people who need your protection. Insurance companies now more than ever, need to be held accountable for their decisions. Without the OHA, there is no accountability. The citizens of Connecticut are counting on you to do the right thing.

Respectfully submitted,


Sharon Hines