

Testimony in SUPPORT of House Bill 5384: An Act Concerning Prescription Drug Costs

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I am a psychiatrist training at Yale School of Medicine. Over the last 2 years I have treated patients with psychiatry illness and substance use disorders in emergency departments, outpatient clinics, and inpatient hospitals. In each of these settings I have treated patients who were unable to take their medications because of cost. Connecticut residents deserve to have access to fair and reasonably priced medications that will allow them to live full, productive lives. This is why I support the HB 5384.

Let me share the story of a patient I recently treated. She was diagnosed with schizophrenia 15 years ago. For the last 10 years she had been living successfully in her apartment, taking care of her cat, and spending time with her nieces and nephews. She saw her outpatient psychiatrist monthly and was happy to be on a medication regimen that kept her hallucinations under control. When I saw her, she was disheveled and distressed. Her hair was messy, her clothes stained, her eyes darting around the room. She was able to tell me that the derogatory voices commanding her to kill herself had returned, that this frightened her, and she was afraid she would act on their commands. She later told me that she had started skipping doses of her psychiatric medications because she was no longer able to afford her medications after a change in her insurance coverage. It was clear to see the extreme suffering this patient was enduring because she could no longer afford her medications.

I wish that this patient's case was an exception and not the norm, but nearly one in ten Americans don't take their medication as prescribed because of unaffordability.¹ That's over 715,000 people in Connecticut alone. This attempt to save cost leads to poorer health and increased emergency room use and hospitalizations. When my patient was able to afford her medications, her illness was controlled, and she was able to stay in the community where the average cost per day of care is \$12.² But when she went without her medication and decompensated, she came to the emergency department, where the average cost per day is 82 times more than when she was at home.³ Because of the severity of her illness, she needed inpatient psychiatric hospitalization, which has an average cost per day of \$1,500 per day.

In summary, many Connecticut residents cannot afford the medications they need to live full and productive lives. I do not believe that they should have to suffer exacerbations and progressions of their illnesses so that the pharmaceutical industry can ensure its profit margin. If passed, HB 5384 would increase transparency around prescription drug costs and improve patients' access to fair and reasonable priced medications.

1. Sara R. Collins, Petra W. Rasmussen, Michelle M. Doty, and Sophie Beutel. 2015. The Rise in Health Care Coverage and Affordability Since Health Reform Took Effect; Findings from the Commonwealth Fund Biennial Health Insurance Survey, 2014. The Commonwealth Fund, January 2015.
2. <http://txcouncil.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Impact-of-Budget-Cuts-to-Community-based-Mental-Health-Services-Final-3-9-11.pdf>