

Letters to the Editor

Health Care is a Human Right

To the Editor:

The headline reads "Armonk Woman's Medicaid Battle Imperils Her Health Care" — while the article explains how it threatens her health and life, it omits the solution increasing numbers of New Yorkers are calling for: the universal, comprehensive, low-cost health coverage of the NY Health Act.

Despite being born disabled with diastrophic dysplasia, which affects her bones and cartilage, Geri Mariano, lived independently for almost five decades, because of Medicaid. Her resilience and fortitude in the face of profound physical

challenges inspire me.

A year ago, Mariano was switched from government Medicaid to "managed care" Medicaid. What is managed care Medicaid? Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) have a contract with the state to provide care at a fixed amount per patient each month. So the only way to make profit is to reduce costs by reducing health care.

I feel for this woman because I have had Lou Gehrig's disease for 21 years. If I had not won 24/7 nursing from my employer, I might be in the same situation. In the future, I might be forced into managed care Medicaid.

For Mariano, her long time primary care physician was suddenly out of network. Coverage for her prosthetic legs and physical therapy was eliminated. Perhaps the worst, her two trusted aides saw their pay cut and hours reduced.

Over half of Medicaid recipients are on MCOs and the trend is growing. Some are owned by financial firms. That tells us they are in MCOs to make money, not to deliver health care to needy citizens.

Health care is a human right, not a luxury product. The United States spends twice as much on healthcare as the rest of the industrialized world, but

achieves much poorer health outcomes. Like the MCO's, we're getting a bad deal. It's time to get profits out of health care — by removing high-cost middlemen who make their profits by denying care, not giving it. Also by removing the 2003 Congressional prohibition on volume discounts for drugs and medical devices. If you think MCOs are a travesty, call your state senator, assembly member and Governor Cuomo, asking them to protect us from profit-seeking gatekeepers by passing the NY Health Act this spring.

**CATHERINE WOLF
Katonah**