

Utah Med Student Makes Film about Life in the Coverage Gap

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By ANDREA SMARDON

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Link: <http://kuer.org/post/utah-med-student-makes-film-about-life-coverage-gap>

Audio: http://cpa.ds.npr.org/kuer/audio/2015/09/DonutHole_WEB.mp3

A new film about the healthcare coverage gap in Utah is screening at the University of Utah college of law Tuesday night.

It's called Donut Hole.

Filmmaker Spencer Merrick is a second year medical student at the University of Utah. On his rotations in

charity care clinics, he says he's seen a lot of people who are going without screenings or treatment until their conditions become serious or sometimes deadly.

"It's unfortunate to see that people are making health decisions based on whether or not they can afford it, which is no way to manage your healthcare."

Merrick decided to make a film that explores the experiences of Utah adults who can't afford health insurance and don't qualify for Medicaid. It's estimated there are about 65,000 people who fall in this category. One of the people featured is Carol Frisbee, who is diagnosed with stage four colon cancer. She had coverage through the state's Primary Care Network. That covers basic services and some prescriptions, but not a colonoscopy, which was recommended for her years earlier. When the disease gets worse, Frisbee qualifies for Disability Medicaid, but it's too late for prevention at that point. The camera follows her to a doctor's appointment where she receives bad news.

"The disease has progressed," the doctor tells her. Shortly after that appointment, it becomes clear that Frisbee is dying.

"I'm running out of time," Frisbee said. She died in July this year. Merrick says he hopes the film puts a face on the coverage gap.

"This isn't just a financial decision. This isn't just some detached ideological argument about Obamacare or national debt," Merrick says. "This is something real, and this is something we can fix."

A group of six Republican lawmakers have said they have a conceptual plan to provide coverage for those most in need while respecting state taxpayers, but they have not revealed the details. Utah Governor Gary Herbert says he is hopeful there will be a special legislative session this year to decide on a plan that closes the coverage gap.

