

Families without medical coverage face tough battles

BY PATRICE ST. GERMAIN • THESPECTRUM.COM • JULY 6, 2009

At recent health care reform meeting held at various locations across the state, several people talked about their personal experience with health care - in many cases the lack of health care because of no insurance.

In the United States, there are an estimated 46 million uninsured Americans.

Called at the meeting "the face of the uninsured" it's a label that Kanab residents Doug and Mary Dewitz are very familiar with as the couple have three adult children without health care coverage and two with health problems.

Mary works for the Bureau of Land Management and Doug is a contractor so they have health care coverage but are going in debt trying to help their children.

"With no available health care, that forgoes preventative measures for dental and health care let alone trying to address their (current) health problems," Doug said.

Doug said Amy Dalton, Mary's daughter from a previous marriage, has suffered from health problems for most of her 34 years.

Starting out with various aches and pains beginning at the age of 12, Amy's biggest problem has been the lack of a diagnosis.

Suffering from encephalitis and spinal meningitis and a pseudo tumor, the multitude of health problems would prevent Amy from getting coverage because of her preconditions - unless it was group coverage.

But because of the pseudo tumor, which gives Amy debilitating headaches, she is unable to work and has been denied Social Security several times and she has no access to Medicaid.

"She is not looking at Social Security income for life," Doug said. "The problems have never been addressed and at this point, Amy has a sustainable existence at the lowest level."

While the Primary Care Network recently had open enrollment for uninsured adults in Utah, since the state funded insurance only covers preventative healthcare, it wouldn't help Amy.

Doug and Mary's son, Brent, 24, has also had health problems and has ended up in the emergency room every few weeks for the last several years.

After having "every test under the sun," Doug said his son still has an undiagnosed condition.

Concerned with his son's condition, Doug said he and Mary have talked about taking Brent for another opinion but in order to do that, the couple will have to cash in some retirement funds.

Doug's frustrated because Amy and Brent are falling through the cracks and while he would like to see a national health care system, feels that the business of insurance should be separated from health care.

"My kids are between a rock and a hard spot and they can't get well," Doug said.