

#56 Struggles Of Healthcare in Rural Areas

When compared to their urban counterparts, rural residents have it much worse in the healthcare department due to several economic factors, limited access to specialized health care and emergency services, and exposure to specific environmental hazards. Due to these factors and the small rural residential town, I reside in Stephenson, MI. My issues such as Celiac and Type 1 Diabetes are much more difficult to take care of. Within Stephenson, there is only one clinic, and it is a small family run health clinic, Dr. Carlson's. This is a big issue because whenever I must get bloodwork done or I need to get a diabetes checkup, my mom and I must drive down to Green Bay or Milwaukee for a routine checkup.

One major problem my town has with healthcare clinics is we are a poverty-stricken town, and we do not have any major healthcare equipment. This makes things severally difficult to manage my diabetes and celiac. These are two autoimmune diseases that I have been diagnosed with, using the help of only going to a bigger city for diagnosis. Our local hospitals and clinics don't have the technology bigger cities do along with the proper doctors to diagnose.

When I was 17 months old, my mom said I was very sick. She took me to a local clinic in our rural town where I was diagnosed with the flu. I wasn't improving, that's when my mom took me to the closest emergency room. After 3 emergency room visits, my mom contacted my local family physician and stated that I was not improving and something had to be done. That's when Dr. Carlson got in contact with some of her colleagues from big cities. When they all put their heads together and discussed what was going on, one of her friends, who is an endocrinologist, told her what needed to be done. Doctor Carlson immediately called my mom and stated she needed to bring me directly to the emergency room and she would meet us down there. From there, they performed several tests, and I spent the next 3 weeks at the ICU in Milwaukee. The doctor stated I was three-four days away from death for how high my blood glucose levels were, and I was in diabetic ketoacidosis.

Anytime I need to go to the emergency room due to sickness, my parents must pretty much tell the doctors what is wrong and what I need done to help my health improve. It is very scary and irritating for not only myself but also my family. Besides, we only know three other people in our area that live with these autoimmune diseases. This makes it hard when there is no one to compare or talk about issues that come up as life goes on.

Having celiac in our very small rural town, I can't even go out to eat without having cross contamination. My parents will make special trips just to Green Bay so I can enjoy going out for a meal that will not make me sick. Local restaurants and gas stations that serve food have no exceptions for people with celiac.

Now a senior in high school, I want to go to college in the medical field to become a doctor. I want to bring more awareness to other people and families that must live with these autoimmune diseases. I feel that coming from a very small rural area, I can help bring awareness too and help others detect diseases sooner. I would also like to conduct meetings in the area, free of charge, so that families can be educated. Educated not only on auto immune diseases but also the risk factors that come with them. Educate on proper foods that will also keep them safe.

Living in what is considered a retirement town, our elders struggle to get the care they need. I also feel if we could bring awareness to local clinics and hospitals, they could possibly bring in

more specialty doctors. Our area and hospitals lack specialty doctors and clinics, making it very hard to get proper care without having to travel 100 plus miles out of our way. Our elderly then wouldn't have to depend on family to transport them to these bigger cities for proper care.

All these problems and issues we have in rural areas are what has caused me to apply for this scholarship, problems such as economic poverty, not having proper healthcare diagnosis equipment and specialized doctors, and being a small town. My own personal struggle and many more people who struggle with the issues. Making a difference for those struggling families and rural areas could and would turn many people's lives around. People with sick family members or future kids with autoimmune diseases such as myself.

Thank you for taking the time and reading my essay for the National Rural Health Day Essay.