

Testimony of Benetta Sarro  
Partnership for Coverage Hearing  
September 5, 2007

Hello. My name is Mrs. Patrick Sarro. Most people call me Bunnie. On October 26, 2006 my world stopped at 3:40 am, when I held my dying husband in my arms. He had non-small cell lung cancer, from which he passed away that night. He was a husband, a father, a son, and a brother. We had almost 22 years together and 12 children between us.

In the end, it came down to medications that he couldn't have. They were out there and we just didn't have the money to buy them. This is our story, a story of love, commitment and faith. It is also a story about a healthcare system that failed us.

He was a truck driver and I was a waitress. We are simple people who worked hard and paid our bills, and taught our children to do the same. He used to say... if you have everything you need - and a couple of the things you want - you will be fine. Never give up your dreams and you will be a successful person. He called me his lady and I called him my king.

When Pat was diagnosed with lung cancer, he was 59 years old and on Medicare. He had been injured on the job 16 years before and we had been living on a combination of his worker's compensation, social security and my income over the years.

When Pat became ill, we were hard pressed financially. He was at the doctor's three or four times per week. In some weeks, we were there everyday. We paid \$20 in co-payments for each visit. His radiation had a \$50 co-pay. Each of his 14 medications cost \$5 per month. The Medicare premiums were affordable, but because he was always at the doctor, our expenses kept adding up. We sometimes paid hundreds of dollars a month just in co-payments.

Partly because of Pat's expensive illness, I could not afford health insurance for myself. I was a waitress and my employer did not offer benefits. I lost my health insurance when Pat lost his job after his accident. And when Pat became ill, I was forced to spend much of my time caring for him instead of keeping my job. I didn't see the doctor that much because it was Pat who really needed the doctors.

In the end, as I said, it came down to meds that he couldn't have. His doctor prescribed a targeted cancer therapy called Tarceva. But Pat had hit the infamous 'donut hole' in his Medicare plan. Remember, he was 59 and disabled, so we weren't eligible for EPIC. We could not afford \$710 per prescription, so he did not get the drugs that his doctor thought would help him survive. Instead, we accepted the services of hospice and he was sent home.

Over the next three days, we had over 300 people come to our house to say goodbye. We were so rich in family and friends. At his funeral there

were over 550 people from city officials, to fire fighters to street people who knew him, loved him and respected him.

Today, I am still uninsured. I receive some cancer screenings through the Healthy Women's Partnership at Glens Falls Hospital. I do receive a part of Pat's social security, but I have other health problems, some of which prevent me from working like I used to. I can't afford to see the doctor and I can't afford to purchase a health insurance plan. My monthly income is just enough that I do not qualify for any Public Insurance Programs in New York State. My one hope now is that I do not encounter any major health problems before I am eligible for Medicare in one year.

I don't know if Pat's meds would have bought him more time. But I do think we should have been given the chance to find out. And I do know that 12 children, 23 grandchildren and 9 great grandchildren will never share their hopes and dreams and problems with him again.

He was Papa to everybody.

We are just one family. How many more like us are out there? How many more may have suffered because they could not afford care? I don't know, but I hope and pray that my story will help you make good decisions so that no one has to suffer like we do.

Thank you and god bless you all.