

2009 - It's Time!

Why We Need National Health Care Reform Now



Two of Charlene Harmon's friends lost their lives in March of 2009 due to heart disease, a preventable and treatable condition. Like her friends, Charlene has heart disease and is uninsured.

Charlene Harmon grew up with Delores Dye and Sylvester Johnson in Memphis. **"They were nice people, she says. "They would do anything to help you. They were just living quiet normal lives. They were just everyday people trying to survive."** Delores and Sylvester had no health insurance and both died in March 2009 from heart attacks.

Delores thought she had transitional Medicaid, but when she arrived at a local Emergency Room with chest, arm and head pain, she was told she didn't have any health insurance and therefore could not afford the costly chest x-ray she needed. She took an ibuprofen and went home hoping she had only bursitis. Delores had a massive heart attack and died in her driveway that day at the age of 47.

Near the end of his life, Sylvester Johnson worked odd jobs when he could, but his arthritis and heart problems kept him from being able to get steady work. Sylvester was homeless and unable to afford health insurance when he went to the Emergency Room at a Memphis hospital with a headache. Like Delores, Sylvester could not afford the tests he needed. He died in the hospital parking lot at the age of 56 lying on the hood of a car.

Charlene believes both of her friends would be alive today had they been insured. "People should be able to get all the health care they need to survive," she says. "It shouldn't be a problem." Besides mourning her friends, Charlene worries for herself. Her mother, two brothers and sister all died from heart disease, so her high blood pressure is of mounting concern. She makes \$1600 per month as a full time mental health technician and doesn't purchase the \$200 per month insurance her employer offers. Instead she spends that much per month on medication for her 26-year-old daughter Lisa, who is uninsurable due to having sickle cell anemia. Lisa has been attending school to become a pharmacist, but has had to put that dream on hold until her health is more stable. **Lisa hopes to qualify for AccessTN since she was recently dropped from TennCare, but she is not sure how she will be able to pay for AccessTN while she is in school or too sick to work.**

Charlene has researched the cost of insuring herself and her daughter through private health insurance companies. These companies refuse to insure her daughter, but offered her a plan for \$150 per month with a \$500 deductible. This plan will not cover any type of heart disease for two years. **Understandably, Charlene declined to spend half of her income on private insurance, which would not cover her needs.**



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