Please Don’t Do It Louisiana

September 29, 2017 By Carleen McGuffey

Approximately 20,000 Medicaid recipients and 15,000 uninsured people in Louisiana are infected with the Hepatitis C virus. This doesn’t include prisoners. Treating these patients offers substantial long-term benefits, but would cost Louisiana about $764 million. I love to hear that Louisiana Health Secretary Dr. Rebekah Gee of Louisiana is considering how to treat people with Hepatitis-C. However, it concerns me to hear how she wants to do it.

Dr. Gee wants to invoke a 100-year-old law that was implemented to serve folks in a time of crisis. She is looking at a couple of different loopholes in these obscure patent laws that may fix her Hepatitis-C problems. This year. But this kind of precedent would surely prove to be the demise of life-saving drugs and the entire pharmaceutical industry as we know it.

Surely Dr Gee can find 700 million to treat patients with Hep-C, the nations deadliest disease. Dr. Rebekah Gee is the Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Health, the state’s largest agency with a budget of $14 billion.

Yippee, I hear you say. Finally, someone has figured out how to beat those greedy bastards. I understand the sentiment, but come, let us reason together.

- Pharmaceutical companies gain funding through money made from their drugs? Yes.

- They are funded by investors who will ONLY continue to invest if they can see a hefty return on their investments? Yes.

This is called Capitalism. It is was keeps us safe, healthy, fed and CURED.

Money alone is what propels science, innovation, research, and the development of cures.

I promise we do not want our Federal Government allowing generics onto the market before the Pharmaceutical companies has had time to get many returns on their investment. Does anyone really believe that the pharmaceutical industry is motivated by altruism? I mean, do people think that when we force Pharma to go broke investors will keep investing?

Having been in the Hep-C advocacy business for a couple of years, I have been given a unique opportunity to peek into the world of Pharma. The truth is that America is charged the most for our drugs because we can afford the most. I know the words afford and drug in the same sentence make many roll their eyes, but trust me you really aren't poor, sick and helpless compared to most of the world. No, you're not. Pharma actually ships alot of medicine all over the world for free, or for discounted prices. Get ready to roll your eyes again, as I share that they do this to relieve suffering, save lives, and contribute to the health of the world. They really do generously serve the poor. No, we aren't poor in America, just lacking in budgeting skills at the federal level, as well as held hostage by insurance companies who refuse to pay out for our medicines.

I still see the 100k cure or the 86k dollar cure quoted in articles when people talk about the new DAAs for Hep-C. That was ticket price a couple years ago, prices have fallen, and been negotiated down substantially. I will say that even at 100k I felt like my cure was a bargain. I was happy to hear that it cost only 100K to CURE me, give me back my life, allow me to have time with my 6 kids, to love on potential grandkids, to be able to recover, and now advocate and serve generously those who are poor, and voiceless. It was worth 100k.

And yet, truth is, I got my drugs for free from the pharmaceutical company that produced it. Never hear about patient assistance programs, do we?

I understand how hard it is to see past our own suffering, to consider others. But we have to. Let's force ourselves to think about those who still wait for a cure and the fact that money is the only thing that will bring that cure to reality. It's money that will promote research, development, innovation, cures, and treatments. If pharmaceutical companies weren't so lucrative I would likely be yellow and on my way to an early death. It's money that propelled those drugs through the pipeline, and money will produce the next cure. That's if Dr. Gee's idea to bankrupt Pharma is denied.

I advocate because Im cured.

It’s money that is producing the cure for your condition, or your children’s health issue. It is money. Every. Single. Time. Like it or not, forcing drug companies to give up their profits will cause you and/or your child to remain sick, uncured and suffering in the future.

I know it’s a shame that we aren’t all motivated by kindness and philanthropy but the truth is that money makes for good medicine. I don’t want my medicine being developed in Africa or India. America continually pumps out the best, safest, most effective medicines year after year. It’s because of money. What is often called greed may actually be the very thing saving us hepatitis C patients from turning yellow and dying a slow painful death. Please, Dr. Gee, consider this when looking for a way to cover this years budget. What you are proposing could potentially set a precedent that none of us can afford.

I know personally how difficult getting life-saving medicine can be. My husband, James, and I have always been self-employed so insurance, healthcare, and medicines have been hard to come by. I have been sick and turned down for health care. I have appealed and been denied medicine to relieve my suffering. It wasn’t just me who suffered, my family, husband and his business suffered. Illness affects entire communities. I understand the fear of dying and the horror of unbearable pain associated with Hepatitis-C. I also understand the value of a cure.

I was in the hospital for a month and in bed for a year with Hep-C Complications.

Dr. Gee has a 12 billion dollar budget to keep the folks in Louisiana healthy, and she cant find 700 million to cure folks of the deadliest disease in the nation. Yep, you read that right. Did you know that Hepatitis-C is deadlier than all other 60 infectious diseases combined? It's true. And the number is growing. Hep-C is in the same family as Zika, there are no reportable cases of transmission through mosquitoes but theoretically, this could happen. I say we address the issue now.

Louisiana is allotted about $100,000 measly dollars from the federal government for the entire state to deal with Hepatitis-C, this despite a 150% increase in Hep-C in just a few years time. Tuberculosis gets 10 times that much, while HIV gets about 100 times the amount Hep-C is allotted.

100k doesn't pay for stationary!

The issue isn't Pharma fault, its poor budgeting, discrimination, the illegal rationing of drugs, and poor Leadership.

Dr. Gee is restricting treatment for patients based on their moral behaviors, the restrictions placed on Hep-C patients in Louisiana is the worst in the nation. Patients are required to abstain from substances for 12 months before they can be treated, that is if they are sick enough, to begin with. Can you imagine being denied your Blood Pressure medicine because you drink wine? Or told you cant have your antidepressant medicine until you get control of your anger. Or you cant have insulin until you lose weight? It's a slippery slope to try to legislate morality. It's also illegal, unethical and just plain wrong to deny patients treatment based on their behaviors.

Wisdom is the ability to see things in the future based on how we behave in the present. Please, I appeal to you Dr. Gee and others who have power, please use wisdom regarding people with Hepatitis-C. No doubt, many of these people have problems beyond their virus, doesn't that make them yet even more worthy of our best efforts to love on and serve them generously? And please,

consider how important it is to allow the pharmaceutical industry to remain private, and lucrative.

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