

I am Teresa Sue Bratton. I am a pediatrician and allergist and I have worked in Guilford County for over 30 years. During this time I have seen patients in my private practice and at the clinic that has evolved from the Child and Youth Clinic of the Guilford County Health Department to Guilford Child Health to today's Triad Adult and Pediatric Medicine. My job has been to help families manage asthma or "allergies" so that their children could run and play, sleep through the night and go to school alert, ready to learn, ready to grow up confident and undeterred, unrestricted, undefined by illness, grow up to be productive, contributing citizens in our country.

I remember caring for one young lady who had missed more than 120 days of school the previous school year because of her asthma. By getting on the right medications, she was able to attend school nearly every day the next school year and move her grades from passing to excellent all around. I believe that this changed her future potential and, in my mind, this change happened because she had access to the healthcare that she needed.

She had access to this care because she had healthcare coverage. Her healthcare insurance, Medicaid, paid for the \$300-400 per month in medication costs needed to control her asthma. Her family would have been hard-pressed to pay for this preventive medication on their income. They might have tried to manage this problem solely with rescue medication, with albuterol. With asthma of this child's severity, it would not have worked. She would have continued to under-perform in school and she would have been at increased risk of dying from her asthma. She would have also probably ended up in the emergency room or hospital at a cost of several hundred to several thousand dollars per visit. This could have easily cost much more than the \$4,000-5,000 per year for her prevention medication. This amount would have been even more difficult for the family to pay. They might have had to declare bankruptcy. With these bills not paid, the hospital would have had greater difficulty meeting its own costs and would have had to shift costs by increasing charges to patients who could pay or, rather, to their insurance, which would have raised their insurance premiums.

And this child was lucky because her healthcare coverage was Medicaid. Prior to the Affordable Care Act a family, whose child had asthma this severe, would probably have been unable to obtain any coverage for this disease under the pre-existing clause.

But what about this child's parent or their older sister or brother...after all, asthma does run in families.

Becoming an adult does not change the dynamics of treating asthma. And after January 1, 2014, those with insurance cannot be excluded because of asthma. But those without health insurance, in particular, those who will not pay a penalty for having no insurance because their income is too low, they will still face the same dilemma of how to pay for the medicine to control their asthma. They will probably have to treat their asthma when they must with the rescue medication, albuterol and oral steroids, drugs with increased risks of bad side effects. Since they cannot pay for their emergency or hospital bills, the hospitals and patients with insurance will bear the costs. These brothers or sisters or parents may miss days of work and so be less productive, more likely to be fired, less likely to raise their income or achieve a job that does have health insurance benefits. Our entire system suffers.

The solution is Medicaid Expansion. All of us need it.