

## Congressional Testimony

I am one of the lucky ones.

Even though an accident a little over a year ago took the life of my husband and left me with severe injuries.

As a physician and gynecologist I had been trained to care for patients, and my more than a decade of training since high school, I feel very qualified to provide that care. I have done countless surgeries and counseled families about the birth of a child, about cancer prevention, or a terminal illness. I have held mothers hands when they lost a child, or given a patient a hug because she was so thrilled that infertility treatment led to a pregnancy.

What I was not trained to do was to be a patient and to go through the fear and powerlessness that comes with being truly ill and needing to be cared for.

I am lucky.

I am the daughter of a university president and have access to the best medical care and services in the country.

What became very clear to me through this experience is that this is not the case for many Americans.

In the room next to me at my rehabilitation center was Emily, a young woman whose husband got in a car accident. The accident left him with injuries so severe he was little more than a vegetable. Emily is a mother of three young children, she had stayed at home and he had worked several construction jobs to make ends meet.

Those jobs provided no health insurance. Emily had to deal with the fact that her husband will never be the same, but she also was forced to put the money they saved for their children's future toward medical bills, go into debt, and lose her hope for helping with her children's financial future. An accident or an illness is punishment enough.

This family joins the millions of Americans who lack health insurance. Most Americans who are uninsured are working, and young, like this family. What became clear to me after the accident is that planning for everything to always go right is just not good enough. Life throws curve balls at us that we don't expect.

I learned how to walk again and although I can't run like I used to. Some of my left arm muscles are still paralyzed from the accident. But I am lucky. Because of the

fantastic medical care and rehabilitation I received, I am doing very well. After the accident I decided that I could either feel sorry for myself or I could devote my energies to trying to fix our broken health care system. I have moved to New Orleans where I serve as the medical director for women's and children's health for Louisiana. I take care of patients. I am able to make a difference for others every day because I was able to get the health care that I needed, and I think that all Americans deserve the same opportunity.

Health care access for every American must be a priority. Before the accident, I understood the need for health care reform from an academic perspective, but I didn't realize it firsthand. This is a precious time in the history of our country, a time when we can do it right. I don't want to stand by and watch reform not be enacted because of fear of change or will not make health care affordable.

The public option is necessary to allow competition and choice for Americans who are being failed by the current system, we know from past experience that insurance companies are not going to regulate themselves because they are motivated by the profit motive.

As a physician I have modified my expectations about salary and did not go into medicine for the money.

Insurance companies are going to have to make the same sacrifices that many physicians have already had to make.

In the healthcare industry, we are now going to have to focus on how we are going to create a healthy America where every child born in this country has a chance to be healthy and succeed. We need to put mission over profit

and the public option will help coax insurance industries to do so.

Even though I have had a tremendous loss, I have the opportunity now to use what I learned from that loss to help others. As a physician, as a patient, and as an American I can no longer tolerate the injustice in our system, and will do everything I can to work to change it. Including the public option in a health care reform plan ensures that health care will be affordable and accessible for all Americans. It doesn't limit choice but it creates a real, affordable option for families like Emily's. Ultimately, it is just the right thing to do.

Rebekah E Gee MD MPH

Obstetrician/Gynecologist