Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

When Insurance Is Lost

Gail B. - South Holland, Illinois

That's Medicaid *shares stories of people covered by Medicaid at critical points in their lives, underscoring the importance of stable health insurance coverage in building a Culture of Health.*

Gail B., RN is a home health and hospice staff educator and mother of three. She knew all about Medicaid throughout her career, but never thought she'd need it or qualify for it herself.

When doctors removed a lump in her breast, they discovered she had treatable breast cancer.

Privately insured through her employer, Gail, who had previously survived cervical cancer, underwent a painful radiation regimen, which left her with oozing underarm burns. She could barely keep her eyes open when she got home after her 50-mile roundtrip commute, let alone try to prepare a meal for herself. Still, she felt fortunate to have insurance. But near the end of her treatment, she was laid off—losing her job and her insurance.

Unemployed, uninsured, and ill, Gail didn't know what to do or where to turn, until a friend recommended she apply for the Illinois Breast and Cervical Cancer Program, which provides treatment through Medicaid.

Sheepishly, Gail visited Mercy Hospital in Chicago, where a staff 'navigator' helped her enroll for Medicaid. Her doctors quickly accepted her new insurance coverage, enabling Gail to schedule follow-up appointments for that same week.

Gail finished her treatment as a Medicaid beneficiary and returned to the workforce cancer-free just a few months later. While she is no longer on Medicaid, she credits it with saving her life and supporting her through her time of crisis. These days, Gail also volunteers as an ambassador for breast cancer survivors in her spare time.