

Sarah, Yakima

Walking a healthcare tightrope



Being born with a hole in your heart and cysts on one lung can make growing up really tough. Just ask seven-year-old Sarah McIntyre.

“Sometimes it’s hard because I can’t breathe and I want to ride my bike,” she says.

Sarah has difficulty breathing even though her heart was repaired and the cysts removed from her lung. Her love of bicycle riding belies the ongoing frailty of her health.

“Just looking at all the things she does, no one would know she is as sick as she is,” says Sarah’s mom, Vicky McIntyre.

Regular medical care is the key to a happy and active life for Sarah. With it, her future looks bright, full of all the things she loves to do, like camping, reading and playing sports. Without it, illness will likely dominate Sarah’s life, robbing her of the joy and innocence that all kids deserve.

Now, the quality of Sarah’s life hangs in the balance. Until age five, Sarah qualified for coverage through the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). But in 2006 the family’s income increased. It was enough to make her ineligible for the program, but not enough for the McIntyres to afford the comprehensive kind of private insurance Sarah needs. Neither Vicky nor Dewayne can get affordable or adequately comprehensive medical coverage for Sarah through their jobs.

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That leaves Sarah and her parents, Vicky and Dewayne, walking a healthcare tightrope. Sarah is stable now. She manages her bronchial asthma with medications that cost the family nearly \$800 a month. And so far, the family hasn’t needed to make the familiar trek to Children’s Hospital in Seattle, where Sarah has gotten specialized care in the past.

“I don’t know what we’ll do if there is an emergency, or how we’ll be able afford Sarah’s prescriptions,” worries Vicky. “I’ve been at my job for 12 years and my husband at his for 10 years. I’m not asking the state to support my family. I just want help to get the proper medical care for my daughter.”

Because of the state’s Cover All Kids law, Sarah should be eligible for insurance again in January, 2009, when eligibility is extended up to 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

In the meantime, Sarah and her family will remain uninsured—and her future will remain uncertain.