

My name is Laura Yanez. I am a mother of an 18-year-old son who lives with mental illness. My son was diagnosed with Attention Deficient Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) at 7 years old. He was able to manage without medication until middle school, when the demands of being able to focus for long periods of time made it impossible for him. At 14 years old he began to show symptoms of depression and became suicidal. He was then diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder Reoccurring and Generalized Anxiety Disorder with traits of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Today I am here to share our story of not being able to get the correct medication, and the impact it had on his life and our family.

After he was diagnosed and was able to get medication, his life changed. Before that, he was failing most of his classes, I could not get him to bathe, and it was a battle to get him to go to school. I constantly worried that he was going to hurt himself. With the proper medication, his grades improved from a D's and F's to a A's and B's. He was began to feel better and was able to verbalize his emotional pain instead of planning his death.

He had been on his medication for several months, and then one day I went to the pharmacy to pick up a refill and was told that his insurance no longer covered his ADHD medication. As a working single mom, I could not afford to pay out of pocket for his medication. We would need to work with the doctor to get a medication his insurance would pay for. Unfortunately he was with me at the time we were denied his medication. Although it was not what was said, *what he heard* was that he couldn't have his medication - which in his mind meant he would go back to the pain he was in before taking medication. To him, not being able to get one medication meant he wouldn't be able to get any medication at all. This reflected the "all or nothing" thoughts of a teenager. That night and for the next few days, my son was suicidal. By suicidal I do not mean he was thinking about dying, I mean he was actively planning his death to include a means, a time, and a place to make a suicide attempt. His plan always include a time frame within 24 hours, and he would choose a method that he could easily access. I kept him on suicide watch at home while we tried to get another medication.

We found a medication that the insurance would cover and things settled down for a short period of time. The calm did not last long. After two weeks on the new medication, things started going very badly. The new medication gave him racing thoughts, irritability and led to suicidal thinking. One evening, he was talking about planning to kill himself, and he had a bottle of Tylenol in his hand, which can be lethal. I attempted to take the Tylenol from his hand and he became physically aggressive with me. He was both bigger and stronger than me and injured my back when I hit a wall. It was the only time in his life he has been physically aggressive.

I am happy to say that we now have access to the correct medication. My son entered college though a special program at 16 years old and will graduate with his Associate's Degree this year at 18 years old. He plans to transfer to a university to study engineering in the fall. I am aware that the idea of not having access to his medication is still a major trigger for him. He is terrified of feeling like he did without his medication. Without having the right medication - determined by him and his doctor - my son would not be looking forward to graduation or a career in engineering. Without the right medication, my son would be dead.