

Testimony to the Joint Task Force on Universal Health Care SB 770

Members of the Task Force;

My name is John Frohnmayr. I live in Albany, Oregon and can be contacted through my website: www.johnfrohnmayr.com. My testimony to you is from my experience with V.A. care, and with Medicare Advantage through AARP (United Health Care). I totally support the necessity of universal coverage for all Oregonians and a medical home for each that delivers and manages quality care. As you will see, my personal experience underscores the urgency of your task.

I reproduce here a letter I wrote to Senator Ron Wyden out of frustration with the V.A. system. It is self-explanatory.

Nov. 20, 2015

Sen. Ron Wyden

221 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg

Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: VA referral to TriWest Healthcare Alliance

Dear Ron:

As you know, both of my brothers have died in the last several years: Phil at age 66 and Dave at age 74. You were gracious enough to speak at Dave's memorial service, which all of the family appreciates greatly.

Both Phil and Dave carried the BRCA2 gene which exacerbated their illnesses and ultimately led to their deaths. Therefore, I wanted to have some genetic testing to determine if I also carry that gene. I sought that genetic testing through the VA for which I am eligible from my service in the Navy during Vietnam. It has been a nightmare which I will recount as briefly as possible.

On June 16, 2015 I saw Dr. O'Bany at the VA center in Prescott, Arizona where I was living at the time. He said he would request the testing from an outside source.

On Sept 18, 2015 I received a letter from TriWest Healthcare Alliance, P.O. Box 42049 Phoenix, Ariz. 85080-2049, tel 1-866-606-8198. This letter informed me that I was authorized to have the genetic testing done at OHSU. (I had requested OHSU because they have some history on members of my family). The date set was Oct. 20, 2015. A copy of the letter is enclosed. [that letter is not included here].

I presented myself to OHSU and they informed me that the authorization from TriWest was inadequate, lacking patient name/date of birth; test name (with ICD 10 code; M.D. name and signature.

I recontacted TriWest on Nov. 5, 2015, having moved in the interim to Bend, Oregon at the address below. I talked with a person named Rachael and gave her the information that OHSU needed for proper authorization and asked her to get it. She apologized and said she would "check with someone".

Not being satisfied that my request would be met, I called TriWest again the next day, Nov.6, 2015, talked with Shedala, who took down the information that OHSU needed and said she would be sure to get it. Nothing happened.

On Nov. 16, 2015 I called TriWest again, this time talking to Wilhemena. She said that they, at the phone number on TriWest's stationary, could not deal with my request and that they would have to transfer me. I asked why the first two people I had talked to didn't give me that information. She had no answer. I asked to speak to her supervisor whose name, she told me was Fern. After 20 minutes of waiting she returned and told me Fern was "not available".

I asked her for the number of the person to which she was going to transfer me, so I would not have to go through this run-around again. She said "that number hadn't been set up yet " and the only way I could get through was to be transferred.

Upon transfer on Nov.16, 2015 I talked to Arabella who said that an appointment had been requested for me with OHSU on the afternoon of Nov. 24, 2015 but they had not yet gotten a confirmation back. Since that is next week and will require me to travel to Portland just before Thanksgiving, I asked if she could confirm it. She said she would put in an "urgent request". I asked her to put a tickler on it for Wed. Nov. 18, 2015 and she said she would.

Having heard nothing , I called TriWest again on Nov. 19, 2015, this time talking to Marlon. He didn't seem to have much information. He tried to regenerate the letter of authorization I have and was unable to do so. He told me that since I have gone to OHSU and tried to keep that appointment, I would have to start over and get a new authorization from my doctor. I again asked to speak to his supervisor, was put on hold, this time for 28 minutes. When Marlon returned he told me "nobody was available" and that I had to get a second authorization.

So that is where I am; no test, no authorization and lots of frustration. I draw the following conclusions:

1. TriWest is totally incompetent and should be fired.
2. The VA referral program is a joke, and a cruel one at that.
3. Most veterans probably would have quit trying to get authorization after being jacked around two or three times, but to me it has become something of a cause.
4. Our veterans deserve better.

I hope you can do something about this, not so much for me because I have more resources than most, but for the vets who have no other recourse. Best personal regards.

Sincerely,

John Frohnmayer

c. TriWest Healthcare Alliance

Senator Wyden's office contacted me on Jan. 8, 2016 saying they had not yet heard from Tri-West. I was finally scheduled for an appointment on April 11, 2016 at OHSU. I arrived only to find that the appointment was not what I had requested—to have a blood draw for the genetic testing—but a genetic counselling session. Believe me, everyone in my family knows more than we ever wanted to know about the nasty genes that have led to the deaths of two brothers and three nieces.

Back I went to reiterate my original request. I won't bother you with the steps in between, but the test was finally completed and the results received on August 18, 2016. It only took 14 months and approximately 20 hours of my time and intervention by a United States Senator to get a blood test done.

My experience with TriWest and the V.A. did not end there. I subsequently have had dermatological referrals (the program of referrals to private providers is supposed to kick in if the V.A. does not have the capability or cannot see the patient within 30 days). I have received three identical letters on the same day, two letters giving conflicting dates for eligibility, notice of an appointment that was five days past, denial of a claim that was clearly covered and multiple assurances from Tri-West that they will do "Whatever it takes" and that my health is their first priority.

Medicare Advantage

For some years prior to this I had Humana Medicare Advantage and was satisfied with it, but Humana discontinued its Oregon coverage and I was forced to find another carrier. I went to one of the free services that helps us ordinary mortals try to navigate the opaque and confusing patchwork of coverage and signed up with AARP UnitedHealthcare. I was assigned to a Dr. Zollinger, received a card in the mail and thought I was good to go (except that I had to deal with three notices from them that I was out of compliance with Obama Care for not having prior coverage—this after I had provided them with proof of VA coverage and Humana).

I heard nothing further until March when they wanted to send a home health assessment person and COVID had hit and I didn't want someone who was seeing multiple persons to come to my home and spend an hour with me, so I demurred. By July it was apparent that COVID was going to be with us for a long time so on July 14, 2020 I called the number on my card to get an appointment with Dr. Zollinger for a baseline exam since we were strangers to each other. I was told I was not on his patient list and would have to get on a list to have a doctor assigned. How long, I asked, and was told it could be several months.

I got a letter dated July 20, 2020 saying "As soon as we have availability, we will call for a visit to establish care..." I called again on August 8, 2020 and was told that there were no providers to schedule me with although they did send me a new card with the name of a new person who is supposed to be my doctor. It is now September 18, 2020, almost three quarters through the year, and I have no provider, have no one who knows my medical history, and have no idea of what UnitedHealthcare is doing with the money they are getting from my social security.

I hope this personal testimony is of some help to you on the task force in emphasizing how inadequate our current system is in providing the most basic services and how essential it is that your good efforts

result in a system that really covers all Oregonians. Please contact me if I can aid in your important work.

End