

HEALTH CARE *from A1*

to that.
"She didn't want to go to the doctor because we didn't have any health insurance," he said.

The Walkers had always paid health insurance costs for their employees, dating back to that first print shop in California 40 years ago. But 18 months ago, the couple was priced out of the market. Three months later, Teresa was diagnosed with colon cancer.

"We make too much for OHP (Oregon Health Plan) and it would cost \$2,000 a month for Teresa and me on the marketplace," Kurt said. "So, that's \$24,000 a year I would be paying for health insurance. That leaves me with \$10,000 for the rest of the year. So, if I paid for health insurance, we would be below the poverty line and we'd qualify for OHP."

2018 requirements for the Oregon Health Plan, a program for low-income Oregonians paid for through federal Medicaid and state funds, require individuals to earn up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$32,900 for a family of four, to qualify.

Teresa is in the middle of a round of chemo, then she'll have another round and then she'll need surgery. Her doctors say she's about half way through her course of treatment. To date, the couple is up to \$262,000 in medical bills.

The community has rallied around the couple, offering meals and setting up a gofundme page. But Kurt manages his schedule so he can cook most of their meals and the couple is thankful for the \$3,610 raised so far out of a \$5,000 goal. But Teresa said it isn't as much about the money as it is about the system.

"Why aren't we talking about this? I'm home more now and watch the news and why aren't we talking about the 35 million Americans who don't have health insurance and can't afford

it?"
According to a 2018 report released by the Commonwealth Fund which was founded in 1918, the percentage of uninsured adults jumped from 12.7

there's a 70 percent chance she's going to need surgery," Kurt said. "She needs to go to Portland but the people here said we better have some kind of insurance before we go."

ment. The company boasts on the page set aside for users to create campaigns, "We're the leader in online medical fundraising" and reports more than \$650 million raised per year for those campaigns. The site makes it easy, letting individuals choose from breast cancer, cancer, IVE, lymphoma, surgery, leukemia or the more-broad, 'health insurance' to launch their campaign pages.

On the Walker's page, they write that they're thankful for people who can donate but push an action more urgent for them: contacting local government representatives to ask for solutions to the health care crisis.

"They say they're helping us, but they're not," Kurt said of senators and congressmen. "They get free health care but they can't seem to fix ours."

The Sentinel reached out to both state and federal representatives from the Walker's district. State Senator Floyd Prozanski cited local options like the Bridge Assistance program for individuals

without insurance and said, "We, as a state and as a country, need to think about our health care policy to insure everyone is able to have access to medical care when they need it." He also offered to speak with Teresa directly. A representative from Senator Ron Wyden's office said his schedule did not allow him to respond prior to the news deadline. Congressman Peter DeFazio's office cited constituent privacy concerns in declining to comment.

Teresa's numbers are too low for surgery right now but she always halts just short of finishing a thought that may lead anywhere other than a healthy, safe recovery. When asked if there is a debt point or moment when the couple runs out of money, if she'll be denied further treatment she pauses. "I don't know."

Her prognosis, according to Kurt though, is good. "It's curable," he said. "It's all curable if you have enough money."

To donate to Teresa's medical bills, visit www.gofundme.com/teresa-and-kurt-walker-medical-fund.



Teresa Walker was diagnosed with colon cancer months after dropping her health insurance due to climbing costs.

percent in 2016 to 15.5 percent in March of this year. The Centers for Disease Control places the number of uninsured adults at 28.2 million.

"I just keep thinking about that story I saw," Teresa said, pausing to gather her voice from tears, "It was that a woman fell onto the subway tracks and she just kept saying, 'Don't call 911, please don't call 911.' She couldn't afford it."

In July of this year, CCTV footage showed a woman exiting a train in Boston when her leg slipped between the platform and the train. Her fellow passengers stepped in to pull her from danger. Bystanders reported at the time hearing the woman beg would-be helpers not to call for an ambulance for the leg that was cut up her thigh and to the bone because it was "\$3,000" and she "couldn't afford it."

"By the time we're done, we're looking at half a million," Kurt said. Teresa's already had a long hospital stay and if she undergoes surgery, it will be for an estimated eight hours and followed by a minimum two-week stay.

"They told us last night that

PeaceHealth has been helping the Walkers ferret out resources and Teresa said the couple has been looking for grants. To date, PeaceHealth's Bridge Assistance program, has paid \$7,000 of Teresa's expenses.

Cheryl Mallory is the assistant director for patient access at PeaceHealth and said that, potentially, 70 to 100 percent of patients' charges could be covered by Bridge. The program follows a process dictated by the federal poverty guidelines and offers set discounts. However, only charges related to PeaceHealth facilities and physicians are eligible for the discount. Teresa's surgery at OHSU would not be eligible.

Kurt has loved Teresa since high school and they've hardly been separated in the 44 years they built their family and raised their children. Their son and a nephew help out at the print shop tackling the design work Teresa used to handle.

There's been only one update on the couple's gofundme page since it was started and became one of the more than 250,000 campaigns on the platform crowdfunding for medical treat-

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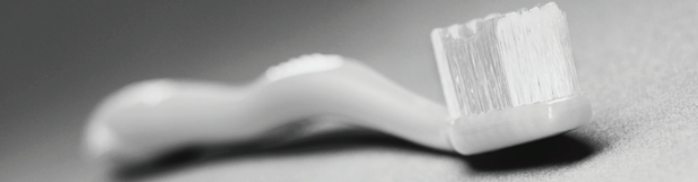
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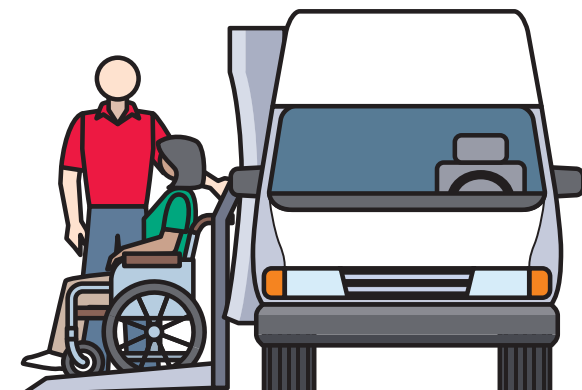
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