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# I am a Catholic physician. Expanding Medicaid in Kansas would protect all lives

BY SHEILA MCGREEVY *SPECIAL TO THE STAR*

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Sheila McGreevy

I am a Catholic physician who is very disappointed in the decision of Kansas Catholic leaders to withhold support for Medicaid expansion in the state in order to leverage support for anti-abortion legislation.

I worked at Duchesne Clinic in Kansas City, Kansas, and St. Vincent's Clinic in Leavenworth, Kansas, from 2003 to 2013. There, I had the privilege and responsibility of taking care of low-income residents of Wyandotte and Leavenworth counties who could not afford private insurance and were not eligible for Medicare or Medicaid.

I took care of people like Julie (names have been changed to protect my patients' privacy), an uninsured woman in her 20s who asked me, "How do I know when my gallbladder is about to burst?" During one of her three emergency department visits for severe abdominal pain due to gallstones, someone told her to come back when her

gallbladder was about to burst. Then, maybe, she would get admitted for an emergency surgery to remove it.

I remember “Ron,” an uninsured man in his 50s, who worked as a self-employed truck driver before he started feeling run down and fatigued. By the time he swallowed his pride and made his way to Duchesne Clinic, the small lump he noticed in his neck had grown into a throat cancer so large you could see it from across the room.

Then, there was Margaret, an uninsured woman who went blind because of diabetic eye disease. Because of her blindness, she got on the fast track for Medicaid, which we both thought was cruelly ironic — but it was too late to save her vision.

Like our Catholic leaders, I believe in the sanctity of the life of the unborn. But I also believe in the sanctity of the lives of the Julies, Rons and Margarets. When the uninsured are turned away from a doctor’s office because of an inability to pay, or when they walk away from a pharmacy without their insulin, or when they are forced to choose between paying rent or medical bills, they are told their lives do not have value.

They are also told their lives do not have value when they hear on the news that Catholic leaders are choosing to block Medicaid expansion in order to pass anti-abortion legislation. If the motion to vote on an anti-abortion amendment to the Kansas Constitution were passed at the expense of the uninsured, it would be a hollow victory. ***Means matter, and are not always justified by the end.***

Pope Francis wrote in his exhortation on Holiness, Paragraph 101: “Our defense of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development. ***Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection.***”

Sheila McGreevy is an internist and past president of the Kansas City Medical Society Foundation.