Cindy Ramer of Denver, Iowa, lives with the fear of not being able to pay her medical debts. Cindy is a Certified Nursing Assistant whose late husband worked in construction. For many years her husband battled diabetes and heart disease. They could not afford health insurance and struggled to pay for doctors’ visits and medications until his death a few years ago. The overwhelming costs forced them into bankruptcy. Like millions of others, Cindy continues to struggle with financial instability and debt because she lacked health care coverage.

She is currently uninsured after her employer canceled the company’s health insurance plan. Today, instead of seeing a doctor, Cindy goes to free screenings and health fairs in order to find care. Cindy, like a lot of uninsured workers, is willing to pay for health coverage but is unable to find a plan that is affordable and comprehensive.

“I don’t think it’s fair that I’m caring for people and helping them with their health care, and I don’t have adequate, affordable health care of my own,” said Cindy. “I’m not asking for a handout. I’m just asking for something I can afford, and [that] won’t have all these restrictions — that they’ll cover this and won’t cover that.”

Newsweek Profiles Direct Care Worker In Story On Uninsured

(March 2009) Newsweek highlighted the story of Cindy Ramer, a Direct Care Worker (DCW) from Iowa, in an article about the high number of American workers who lack insurance. Cindy, a long-time Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), is currently uninsured after her employer canceled the company’s health insurance plan several years ago.

Instead of seeing a doctor, Cindy now goes to free screenings and health fairs in order to find care. Cindy, like a lot of insured American workers, is willing to pay for health coverage but is unable to find a plan that is affordable and comprehensive.

The article highlighted a recent study by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that found that 1 out of 5 American workers is uninsured. Among direct care workers (DCWs) that number rises to almost 1 in 3. Efforts are under way to create a premium assistance program for DCWs in order to make employer-sponsored health coverage more affordable.

– Allison Lee, National Campaign Manager, Health Care for Health Care Workers, March 31, 2009

Direct Care Worker Selected as Delegate to County, State, and National Democratic Conventions

Cindy Ramer, Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), participated for the first time in the Iowa Caucuses. Because of her personal experience and passion about the need for health care reform, Cindy also became a delegate to the County, State, and National Democratic Conventions. Sadly, she could not participate in the National Convention due to a lack of resources to cover her travel expenses.

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Cindy Goes to Washington

Cindy Ramer, Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), shared her story about a lack of health care coverage, medical debt, and bankruptcy with her Congressional members.

Left: Cindy Ramer, CNA
Bottom: Cindy Ramer, CNA, Congressman Bruce Braley, John Hale, Policy Director, and Di Findley, Executive Director

How One Story Helped Shape Health Care Reform

“I’m not asking for a handout, I’m just asking for something I can afford.”
– Cindy Ramer

Cindy with Elizabeth Edwards, Senator John Edwards, and then Senator Hillary Clinton.
All About Cindy

HOMETOWN: Denver, IA

A FEW WORDS ABOUT MY WORK: I work at Harmony House Health Care Center in Waterloo, IA in the MR unit. I am a CNA and Program Assistant, which supervises the direct care staff. I do the scheduling, set up and assist with training and work the floor when we have staff shortages.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: I am a member of the Iowa CareGivers Association’s Direct Care Worker Leadership Council and the recipient of the ICA Leadership Award. I am also a graduate of the Direct Care Alliance Voices Institute.

MY FIRST JOB: My first job was as a Development Assistant in the MR unit at Harmony House.

MY FAVORITE PART OF CAREGIVING: Working with and spending time with the residents. Sometimes they just need a smile or a hug and sometimes they just want to give me a hug or smile. It makes my day go better.

THE TOUGHEST PART ABOUT CAREGIVING: Confronting an angry staff member and trying to fix the problem. I think the leadership training has helped with that.

SOMETHING I’D LIKE TO CHANGE ABOUT THE CAREGIVING INDUSTRY: I would like to help others understand that we are professionals and we need better benefits and wages, so that we can take care of ourselves and our families.

HOW CAREGIVING WILL CHANGE IN THE NEXT DECADE: As I and many of my peers of the Baby Boomer generation reach retirement, the need for CNAs is going to increase. My generation is going to want more home or assisted living care, and we are going to need many more CNAs to meet the demand.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU HAVE FOR EMPLOYERS ABOUT WHAT THEY NEED TO DO TO FIND AND KEEP DIRECT CARE WORKERS? Just to recognize us as professionals, help to improve wages and benefits, and to give us lots of encouragement so we can do our best to give the best care we can!