

Unfortunately This Is An Example Of What Can Happen To An Uninsured Person

Hospital discharges uninsured mom with bullet in her eye

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Ruby Cintròn was watching New Year's Eve fireworks from her back porch when she suddenly screamed and fell backward.

A stray bullet fired during the midnight celebration had gone into her eye. The young mother's first worry was her two small children, relatives said, afraid that they also had been hit.

But soon, she had new worries. The Cintròns both work but do not have health insurance to pay for the surgery she needed to repair her eye.

Three days after the 26-year-old was admitted to Orlando Regional Medical Center, her husband, Domingo, said, a hospital employee asked how they planned to pay for her care.

Cintròn was discharged Tuesday, with the bullet still in her head.

A reporter for the Spanish-language newspaper *El Nuevo Día Orlando* told Cintròn's story to Consejo de Latinos Unidos, a national nonprofit organization that helps the uninsured. Executive Director K.B. Forbes said his organization got her admitted to St. Mary's Medical Center in West Palm Beach, where she will undergo surgery.

Domingo Cintròn says that his wife was crying from the pain when Orlando Regional Medical Center decided to discharge her. He says the discharge order came minutes after he admitted he could not pay for treatment, and his wife was not even given time to change her clothes.

Christine Martinez, a spokeswoman for the medical center, said hospital workers helped Cintròn apply for Medicaid and referred her to a surgical specialist who could help her.

The hospital discharged Cintròn with the bullet still in her eye because a doctor there thought he might do more damage by trying to remove it, Martinez said. Surgeries to rebuild the eye are complex and almost always done by specialists at their own offices, she said. "In no way do we ever turn patients out for payment status," she said.

Forbes said his agency will pay for Cintròn's treatment if she doesn't qualify for Medicaid or receive other aid.

The Cintròns both work up to 12 hours a day in a photo kiosk they own in a mall, Domingo said. But they make just over \$30,000 a year, barely enough to pay for two children and the mortgage on their house in Orlando.

Domingo Cintròn said he has a preexisting medical condition, which raised the cost of insuring the family to \$800 a month. That, he said, was way out of their reach.

Domingo is a U.S. citizen from Puerto Rico, and Ruby immigrated from Ecuador. They married three years ago, and Ruby is in the process of becoming a citizen, he said.

Thursday, after days without rest, he visited his wife again. He worried about telling Ruby she will lose her eye. And he worried they will lose the home they worked so hard to buy.