

# 10 NBC HealthWatch

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## HealthWatch

### Health Advocate Goes To Bat For Patients *Group Cuts Red Tape With Medical Insurance* *Cherie Bank, NBC 10 Medical Reporter*

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NBC 10 medical reporter Cherie Bank has news about a service that helps you figure out your medical bills, negotiate with your medical insurance and find the best service for your sick relatives.



Laurie's mother died at age 32. Her brother died at age 37. That is why Jay Tolson is concerned out his 33-year-old daughter. Like her mother and brother and like many people in her Venezuelan village, Laurie has Huntington's disease, a degenerative brain disorder that is passed from parent to child 50 percent of the time. The disease is characterized by involuntary movements. Laurie can't talk anymore and she can't swallow, either. But what has Tolson upset is that Laurie's oral surgeon made her wait weeks to have a gum infection fixed and then backed out of the procedure. Tolson tried in vain to find another dentist. "I couldn't. We tried. I tried awfully hard," Tolson said.

Tolson finally found Health Advocate, who immediately put him in touch with Dr. Barbara Steinberg. She then operated on Laurie. Steinberg couldn't understand how Laurie kept her sanity with the pain that was a result of the infection. She credits Health Advocate with saving Laurie's life.

Health Advocate is a new service that helps you negotiate the health care system. It is run by five of the people who used to run AETNA U.S. Healthcare. They are people who developed the present health care system, such as medical director Abbie Liebowitz. "If anybody can understand the healthcare system it's the people who created it," Liebowitz said.

The service is sold to employers for their employees. Deb DiLorenzo, president of the Southern New Jersey Chamber of Commerce, has been talking to Health Advocate about getting the service for her members.

As she was discussing business, DiLorenzo mentioned her problem with headaches and how she had seen nine different doctors. "I had a headache for 58 straight days, 24 hours a day," DiLorenzo said.

Within a few days, Health Advocate got DiLorenzo in to see Dr. Steven Silberstein, who runs the headache center at Jefferson Hospital. "Oh, I feel a lot better. Absolutely," DiLorenzo told Banks.

She also signed a contract with Health Advocate. They not only help people find doctors, but they also help coordinate care, help with billing problems, grievances and appeals to insurance companies and help them connect to resources outside of health care -- like senior care for their parents and home health aides.

"It is a tremendous productivity saving for the typical employer," Liebowitz said. That is because most people are going to take care of their health care issues during business hours. "We're much more efficient at doing that than (the consumers) are, and our message to you is you go back to work. We'll work on the problem for you and we'll talk to you the next day or whatever's appropriate. So we keep employees at work," Liebowitz explained.

Librarian Elizabeth McKenty did a lot of research after she suffered a stroke, which was caused by a hole in her heart.

McKenty and her doctors wanted the least invasive surgery to repair her heart, but her insurance company denied it during seven months of appeals. Finally her union told her to talk to the people at Health Advocate. "It was such a relief," McKenty said.

In short order, Health Advocate got McKenty the operation her doctor wanted her to have.

Of course, they can't help everyone, but in their first nine months of operation Health Advocate has signed up 55 organizations.

While it is usually employers who hire Health Advocate for their employees, you can hire them as an individual.

This is especially true if you have one annoying problem that you just can't seem to solve on your own. They normally charge about \$125 an hour, but they may be able to solve a problem in two hours that you've already worked on for seven months.

If you'd like more information you can call a health advocate toll free at (866) 695-8622.