

New bill could alter path of Step Therapy



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ILLINOIS -- Some insurance policies require patients to try medications in a specific order. The process is called Step Therapy. But, patients say it doesn't always work.

A new bill could help people avoid Step Therapy. The bill doesn't ban it, but patients say it could help them get straight to the medications they really need.

April Richardson takes almost 30 pills a day.

"It basically causes severe pain, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It never goes away."

She fell off a ladder at work seven years ago and broke her spine. After 17 surgeries, her wounds are healed, but she's been diagnosed with complex regional pain syndrome.

"It's known as the most painful disease right now that exists."

She's been on more than 100 medications and she says, about half of them haven't worked.

"I've had so many different times when my doctors have known exactly what will help my pain."

She says her insurance policy sometimes requires her to try other medications first.

"Taking it for two weeks, finding out that it's not going to work, then throwing it away."

It's a process called Step Therapy. Dr. Stephen Stone is a dermatologist.

"You start here and if that doesn't work, you go here, and then if that doesn't work, you go here."

He says the process is usually used to keep costs low.

"The doctor is often forced into a position of prescribing something he doesn't want to because it's on a more appropriate step, before being able to move up to the desired treatment."

A new bill could help patients like Richardson. It would set standards for them to appeal the Step Therapy process and request a drug from all health plans in Illinois. It would also allow for overrides if doctors know a drug isn't going to work.

"I had one experience with Step Therapy where they were insisting that I try a drug that I knew I had an allergy to."

Opponents include the Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy. It says there are ways for people to request other drugs, but Stone says the process that's in place right now can be slow.

"It's not in the patient's interest to delay for two weeks or three weeks or four weeks."

He says this bill could help move the process along. Richardson is hopeful because she says everyday without the right treatment is another day spent in pain.

Lawmakers say the bill could make the process more transparent for patients, so they understand why they're being prescribed certain medications. The bill passed the House.

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