

Cover Me: A Health Insurance Memoir

Sonya Huber

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In Sonya Huber's memoir, the Holy Grail is health insurance. Yet her lurching, oft-thwarted journey also poses the larger question of how health, and peace of mind about it, cascades across every corner of one's life. It's a sobering reminder that one cannot be truly well, in a physical or psychic sense, while worried that a sinus inflammation may incinerate that month's rent.

Huber's frustrating drive for coverage has pit stops at every status, from none, to cobbled together semi-coverage, Medicaid recipient, and finally the Promised Land (a laminated member card). This parallels her passage from drifting intellectual, perpetual student, itinerant activist, part-time reporter, and hourly-wage social worker, to credentialed professional, wife, journalist, college professor, and grounded single mother. Her many reinventions at times make it tricky to track her healthcare coverage status, but that only brings up the urgent underlying question: why does one's status—as employee, student, parent, child, ill or healthy person—trump an American human's ability to see the doctor?

"The body will break and that's not the hard part," Huber writes. "I mind the impermanence less than the thought of being made to pay, to worry about paying, to feel ashamed for being inadequate against the force of those bills, to be beaten by the cost of the inevitable, to have to apologize for the paper version of suffering, which tells me that the cost of living in my body is a price I cannot afford."

Huber's tale resonates. Who hasn't encountered obfuscating obstructions in even the best health plan, to say nothing of the millions of un- and underinsured who will read with head nodding (and maybe fist pounding). Amid her many joyless ironies—like working without benefits for a coalition advocating universal healthcare—Huber injects humor and wit, tinged with a humanity clearly honed by experience at every rung of the slippery healthcare ladder. The rest of the story—about love, friendships, motherhood and career—keeps the reader rooting for Huber, hoping she'll find not just healthcare but a happier, healthier life.

Huber's sure-footed prose considers how deeply connected an individual's health is to being both rooted and free, confident or fearful of securing even the most routine treatment. Once covered, she is safe under that blanket of care, and wise enough to understand that covers are easily blown, or blown away.

LISA ROMEO (November / December 2010)

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