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New Opportunities for Funding Dialysis-Dependent Undocumented Individuals

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Abstract

The cost of dialysis for the estimated 6500 dialysis-dependent undocumented individuals with kidney failure in the United States is high, the quality of dialysis care they receive is poor, and their treatment varies regionally. Some regions use state and matched federal funds to cover regularly scheduled dialysis treatments, while others provide treatment only in emergent life-threatening conditions. Nephrologists caring for patients who receive emergent dialysis are tasked with the difficult moral dilemma of determining "who gets dialysis that day." Without a path to citizenship and by exclusion from the federal marketplace exchanges, undocumented individuals have limited options for their treatment. A novel opportunity to provide scheduled dialysis for this population is through the purchase of insurance off the exchange. Plans purchased off the exchange must still abide by the 2014 provision of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, which prohibits insurance companies from denying coverage based on a preexisting health condition. In 2015 and 2016, >100 patients previously receiving only emergent dialysis at the two largest safety-net hospital systems in Texas obtained off-the-exchange commercial health insurance plans. These undocumented patients now receive scheduled dialysis treatments, which has improved their care and quality of life, as well as decompressed the overburdened hospital systems. The long-term sustainability of this option is not known. Socially responsive and visionary policymakers allowing the move into this bold, new direction deserve special appreciation.

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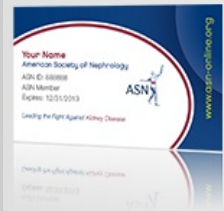
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