

My name is Esther Pew and I am a resident of South Portland. From a young age, I have experienced knee and leg pain. I was an active child, playing basketball, softball, biking, hiking, and so much more. I was diagnosed with Osgood-Schlatter when I was young, but I didn't let the knee pain stop me from being active. As I got older, my knee pain did not go away and instead evolved into a constant pain, even with physical therapy, exercises, and more.

I eventually learned that I had grown in a way that had me a little bow-legged. When I was 19 and 20, I had knee surgery that helped to correct much of my knee pain. My shin bone was moved as was my knee cap. I was on crutches for at least six weeks after each knee surgery and had a metal screw in each knee for a few years so my body could adjust to the new placement of my bones. I am grateful that I was still on my parents' insurance at that time and did not think much about the costs associated with something major like knee surgery, such as a copay. I had physical therapy which helped my recovery be faster and less painful. Physical therapy is so helpful, but can be difficult to access for many, including myself now due to high copay costs.

I will be 35 in October and although much of my knee pain has lessened due to medical intervention, it is not completely gone. As I age, it takes longer for my body to recover from injury, and sometimes it seems like I can hurt myself simply by walking.

I was in physical therapy a year ago for knee and ankle pain. I know the value of physical therapy - as I said it helped my recovery from major knee surgery when I was in my late teens and early twenties. I know going to physical therapy regularly could impact my life positively even more so now as I am older. My doctor wanted me to get physical therapy twice a week. I was happy to schedule these appointments until it came time for me to pay my copay.

My copay for one physical therapy appointment was \$50. This means I could be spending \$100 a week, and sometimes up to \$500 a month for these appointments. That simply does not fit in my budget, and I know it doesn't fit in the budget of so many other people. How can we expect to heal if we cannot afford to go to the doctor or get care?

I don't want to be in pain daily, I want to get help from physical therapy and other medical professionals, but the high cost of accessing care stops me and so many others. This needs to be addressed. Without physical therapy and other forms of medical care that can be preventative, larger issues are bound to happen. I worry about myself but also the many other people who put off care because of the cost.

This is just a snapshot of one thing that impacts my ability (and the ability of so many others) to access affordable healthcare.