

Charlotte mother makes annual trip to bring coverage for Lymphedema

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CHARLOTTE — A North Carolina mother took her fight to change the nation's healthcare to Washington for the second year.

Heather Ferguson of Charlotte, joined dozens of others in urging members of congress to pass a bill that would bring insurance coverage for Lymphedema to almost 6 million sufferers. Her 5-year-old son Dylan was born with Lymphedema. He wears a waist-down compression bandage to prevent his body from swelling.

"He's had the benefit of always getting the treatment he needed," said Ferguson.

But at an out of pocket cost until January 1, 2010, when her fight for a state mandate succeeded, saving North Carolina sufferers thousands of dollars each year in preventive care.

"People just look at him and say why is he wearing those stockings, because there's nothing apparently wrong with him, and that's how it should be with Lymphedema," said Ferguson.

Now Lymphedema is taking aim at Medicare, through a new bill to influence national healthcare coverage in order that people such as Tiffany Howe do not have to suffer.

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"I was misdiagnosed for 19 years," said Howe.

Howe lives in Virginia where coverage and knowledge of the disease is still lacking. Howe received several hospitalizations and multiple infections which she said could have been avoided had her insurance company paid for her treatments.

It is a similar story for dozens of others who are joining the fight that is getting the attention of both Republicans and Democrats, because preventive care costs much less than the covered treatments of complications.

"It may not be quick and easy, but it's the right thing and it makes sense because it saves money," said Ferguson.

For both patients and insurance companies.

Ferguson said her fight to take the bill to the full Congress could realistically last several years because it will likely be bundled with several other Medicare-related bills. It is estimated up to 3 million people on Medicare suffer from Lymphedema.