Mail Order Meds Suck

January 31, 2013 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

As the Twitter hashtag #firstworldproblems underscores, many of the problems we face as people who live in developed countries often seem trivial when compared to those faced by people in developing countries.

That said, our problems are often not so trivial. On the one hand, I'm grateful for having health care insurance that pays for my HIV meds. On the other hand, I'm angry that my insurer forces me to use a specialty mail order pharmacy to provide those HIV meds.

Larry Kramer recently noted his bad experiences with this trend, which is growing in the wrong direction. My opinion is supported by a lawsuit against Blue Cross of California (d.b.a. Anthem Blue Cross) by the advocacy group Consumer Watchdog for just this very thing.

I used to go to a retail pharmacy and be done with it. Now, I have to call every month and be subjected to the most annoying of routines ("that's a tablet to be taken orally" they say and I think "I know, I've taken meds before!"), which wastes 30 minutes that I'll never get back.

Yes, boo-hoo #firstworldproblems and all that. The idiocy of the process is hella horrible, but that's not really the issue (although, as I said, it's hella horrible).

Insurers say it saves them money, but advocates say the savings are at best minimal and at worst a penny wise and a pound foolish. Any tiny savings realized now may be dwarfed by the costs later when patients who are forced to receive their meds this way are harmed in the process. Yes, harmed.

Mix ups in prescriptions, lack of knowledge by service representatives and delays in receiving shipments are just some of the problems with mail order pharmacies that jeopardize health. None of us living with HIV should be subjected to such problems unnecessarily.

The straw that broke my back on this topic happened last week. I was down to a two day supply of meds. I admit that I should've called to refill a day or two earlier, but you know what, I'm human (and you know what, if I could just go to a retail pharmacy, it wouldn't matter).

So, I call. Rush delivery, great. Three days pass, no delivery. I call again Friday night. "It was

canceled.” WTF? “Rep from wrong department wasn’t authorized, so we canceled order.” And you were going to tell me when? “Yeah, you should’ve been called.” Yeah.

So, can I get a rush delivery? “No, too late for that.” Oh, I see. So fuck me then. When can I get a delivery? “Tuesday.” Tuesday? That means being without my meds for at least five days! “Sorry.” Yeah.

I spoke to a supervisor to file a formal complaint, although I expect nothing to come from that. I hope that lawsuit in California begins to turn the tide in our favor.

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