

Cover

Help Kansans fight cancer

Someone with cancer learns of a promising drug he can use as part of a clinical trial. But if he proceeds, his insurance company says it won't cover the rest of his care as set out in his policy. When that happens in Kansas, the patient's treatment is complicated or limited and cancer research can suffer.

And it is happening, physicians with the University of Kansas and the Midwest Cancer Alliance told *The Eagle* editorial board last week. That's why the Legislature should make passing Senate Bill 629 a high priority for this week's wrap-up session.



The bill would not mandate anything new, simply requiring insurers to cover what they've already committed to cover

The KU officials named state Sen. Susan Wagle, R-Wichita; Rep. Brenda Landwehr, R-Wichita; and Rep. Nile Dillmore, D-Wichita, as lawmakers who could help bring the measure forward. Then there is Rep. Clark Shultz, R-Lindsborg, who has allowed the bill to languish in his House Insurance and Financial Institutions since it passed the Senate on a whopping 39-0 vote in March.

The bill would not mandate anything new, simply requiring insurers to cover what they've already committed to cover — including routine doctor visits, lab work, X-rays and prescriptions. The cost of the clinical trial itself is covered by its sponsor. Indeed, Insurance Commissioner Sandy Praeger views and supports the bill as a clarification of existing law. The bill also would have little impact on the state budget.

The problem is not large, because the vast majority of insurance companies fulfill their commitment to patients who choose to join clinical trials. But it's no small matter for the patients and families affected.

Thomas Schulz, the Wichita oncologist who was invested last week with the inaugural Gaines' professorship at the KU School of Medicine-Wichita, said there have been some "fairly significant examples" of such denials of benefits locally.

Patients can appeal to the insurer, but "how timely that is, is an issue," said Roy Jensen, director of the University of Kansas Cancer Center. That makes a difficult time more so for the patient.

This also is no time for cancer research to be undermined in the state, given that KU is seeking designation by the National Cancer Institute as a comprehensive cancer center. Anything that interferes with enrollment in KU's clinical trials is a "detriment," Jensen said.

The fact that Kansas lacks this law, unlike 23 states, also could have a negative effect on recruitment of clinical faculty members, the physicians said.

"It's just common sense and the right thing to do," Jensen said.

Lawmakers need to do their part this week to ensure that insurance companies do right by Kansans fighting cancer.