


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Faces of Medicaid are many — and worried

By Kiah Collier

Posted March 4, 2011 at 4:36 p.m.

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SAN ANGELO, Texas — Cecia Perry retired only when she had to.

After working well into her 70s, the Fort Worth native took a hiatus after being injured in a serious car crash, but continued to live on her own.

Now, living in San Angelo, Perry is one of thousands of elderly Texans who depend on Medicaid.

When she started having health problems two years ago at age 83, Perry said, she found it difficult to give up her independence. With some convincing, she ended up moving to Austin for a year to live with a niece.

"I'd been by myself for so long, independent, cooking and doing things for myself," said Perry, whose husband of 40 years died in 1985. "It was kind of hard for me to get adjusted."

During that year, her health continued to decline. Already diabetic, Perry suffered two strokes that moderately paralyzed the right side of body. Her niece's health had declined as well.

So when her other niece, longtime San Angelo resident Juanita Stemen, became the director of clinical services at Baptist Memorial Retirement Community about a year ago, Perry moved to San Angelo and became one of about 100 residents at Baptist's nursing home, a facility on North Main Street with a reputation for providing quality care.

Perry said that transition was easier.

"I just felt at home here," said Perry, who sees her niece every day. "I don't know why, I guess I had just gotten used to not being by myself. It's been a joy having family here."

During the decades Perry worked as a housekeeper and nanny, she accumulated a modest amount of savings — "I wasn't too thrifty. I was kind of bad with Avon" — and Stemen said their favorite aunt always found a way to get birthday presents for her and her sister.

But with accumulating health care expenses, that savings quickly diminished and Perry — who was receiving aid from Medicare — ended up at Baptist Memorials only after finding out she was eligible to receive Medicaid.

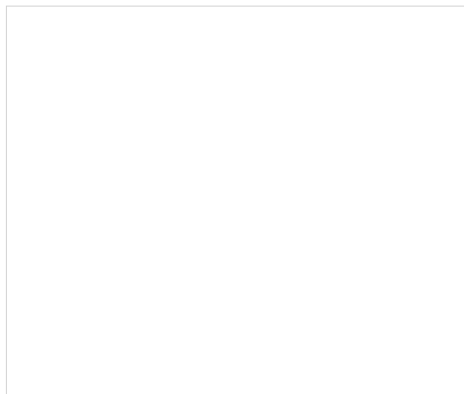
"We were pretty sure she was going to qualify because we knew she didn't have much," Stemen said, noting that her aunt had lived in low-income housing.

The need-based program, which is managed by the states but funded at both the state and federal level, is "a safety net for those who spend down all their money" — often on health care expenses — and need assistance, said Wes Wells, Baptist Memorial's vice president of health care services.

Most, like Perry, worked hard their whole life and generated savings that sustained them when they were healthy but that disappeared quickly when their health declined. Baptist spends about \$156 a day per patient — that's \$4,680 a month — to house, feed and provide medical and other care. About 40 percent of the patients in the Baptist nursing home are on Medicaid. The others — "private payers" — foot that bill out of pocket.

Wells said it is a common misconception that those who end up depending on Medicaid get into that position because they were financially irresponsible.

David Loyd, a retired physics professor and former dean at Angelo State University who now serves on the board that oversees Baptist's endowment said his mother



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