

A Paycheck Away

Many people who work with people who are homeless will caution others, “Most of us are just a few paychecks away from homelessness”. Mary Jezewski can tell you that they are right.

Mary lost her job after a merger in her workplace. Unable to get another job, she found herself without an income, without insurance and without healthcare; even though she knew she had high blood pressure and knew she needed treatment. Frequent headaches – so painful that she feared a stroke was coming—reminded her. She recalls, “I felt trapped, I knew I should do something about my blood pressure; but I couldn’t figure out what to do”. Eventually, her homelessness led her to the Cathedral Center shelter in downtown Milwaukee. That is where St. Ben’s Clinic entered her story.

Ellen Krueger, an outreach nurse for Columbia St. Mary’s-sponsored St. Ben’s Clinic, examined her from an outreach office at the Cathedral Center. Because Jezewski’s blood pressure was so high, Krueger scheduled Mary for an appointment at St. Ben’s Clinic the same day.

The nurse practitioner, Tara Seleen, did a full assessment and began medication to treat the hypertension to resolve what could have been a life-threatening problem. She also found that Jezewski was legally blind in her left eye, perhaps because of untreated hypertension and diabetes, which Seleen also discovered on her assessment. A diagnosis of early Parkinson’s disease followed in later appointments after diagnosis by a Columbia St. Mary’s specialist.

The clinic social worker, Bill Mullooly, helped Jezewski enroll for BadgerCare insurance to cover her ongoing primary care. This would allow Jezewski to seek clinical care in different settings. In fact, Jezewski received a scare when her Parkinson’s disease was diagnosed because Seleen was unsure if such complex care could be managed at St. Ben’s Clinic. Jezewski insisted, “I will not leave St. Ben’s Clinic. The respect, the personal care, the listening... I have not been listened to this well in my life. I wouldn’t leave this clinic”. All were grateful when Dr. Michael Johnstone, St. Ben’s Clinic medical director, agreed that his oversight and Seleen’s ongoing care would allow Jezewski to continue treatment at St. Ben’s Clinic.

Mary continues to seek housing and, with the help of St. Ben’s, to manage her chronic diseases. The clinic gives her the stability and hope that she needs amid her many challenges.



left to right William Mullooly, Mary Jezewski, Tara Seleen APNP and Ellen Krueger RN.