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We All Have Pre-Existing Conditions

Michael Burcham - Guest Columnist

In the health-care world, a pre-existing condition is a medical condition that started before a person's health insurance went into effect.

Before 2014 many insurance policies would not cover expenses related to pre-existing conditions. The logic was you “came to the party with these problems.” so they’re all yours to deal with on your own.

If you were one of the unlucky ones to have been born with some type of medical condition, like diabetes, cystic fibrosis, spina bifida, or had a cancer, a previous back surgery or neurological injury or any time of mental health issue, you were not likely ever to get health care that would cover any recurrence of these issues.

The recent horrific vote in the House of Representatives reminded me of how we all have pre-existing conditions, both physically and emotionally. Today, nearly 30 percent of the population have some combination of diabetes, obesity or hypertension. Nearly half of us will have some sort of heart condition before we die. About 35 percent of us will get cancer in our lifetime.

Often it has nothing to do with what you did or didn't do; it just happens. And if we are lucky enough to survive the ordeal, we will carry the scar of a pre-existing condition the rest of our lives.

There are also many emotional pre-existing conditions we all have. By the time we reach adulthood, most of us have bangs and bruises. We've suffered loss, we've been betrayed by friends or family and sometimes wronged by the system.

For many, the scars of pre-existing conditions start early. The young woman molested by a trusted figure in her life. The young man who is bullied for being different. A child with a stutter who is terrified to speak for fear of ridicule. The wife of an alcoholic father and abusive spouse.

Look around, they're our family, friends and neighbors.

We're all born with pre-existing conditions and into families with them. Sometimes we get lucky and we are surrounded by positive role models and people who believe in us — who look past our flaws and remind us of our goodness. Other times we're stuck in what feels like a continuous uphill climb that's both unfair and unproductive.

In a compassionate world, we should see one another's flaws and scars as badges of honor. The scar where a breast was removed to save a woman's life is a beautiful thing, a symbol of courage, hope and resiliency. The heavy emotional scar I carry from losing my son and wading through constant grief to face the world with optimism. The scars we all carry from pre-existing conditions make us human.

The scars in the hands and feet of the divine should not be viewed as a pre-existing condition, but as a beautiful symbol of love.

I ask our Congress and all of you to honor the journey of humanity. None of us are getting out of this world alive.

Life can be hard enough. We don't have to make the journey worse for our friends and neighbors by ignoring their scars and penalizing them for the bad things that happen in their lives.

The great creator taught love and compassion as the treatment. Not exclusion and punishment of those of us who carry the scars of pre-existing conditions.

Michael Burcham is CEO of Narus and former CEO of the Nashville Entrepreneur Center.