

My name is Jonathan Haug, and I am a physician specializing in Anesthesiology at Altru, and I serve as the Medical Director of Surgery. I have been at Altru for 18 years, grew up in Grafton and Grand Forks, attended UND for college and Medical School. I am as local as you can get, and I am heavily invested in providing the best possible care to the patients of my hometown.

First I want to thank you for taking the time to read my story. I regret that I am not able to speak with you in person.

Over my 18 years in practice, I have unfortunately been a part of surgical cases where the patient had arrived for surgery, and we had to inform the patient that their insurance had not yet approved their surgery, so cancelled surgery. This is a big fail on the part of our health care system. The stress and anxiety of preparing for surgery takes a toll on not only the patient, but also family members.

Just recently I had the opportunity to experience this process with a family member. Last month my 76 year old mother had open heart surgery, replacing her aortic in addition to an ascending aortic aneurysm repair. I won't get into the details of her heart defects, but while this surgery is typically a very complicated operation, the heart defects that my mom has created even more challenges for our surgeon as the workup unfolded.

My mom had been monitoring her heart valve, and when she became symptomatic with shortness of breath and chest pain, we knew it was time to have it repaired. The preoperative workup by cardiology was extensive, and on November 29, she saw her surgeon and was scheduled for surgery. Surgery was set for January 9.

Because surgeries like this require an anesthesia team that is more specialized, we had ensured that our cardiac anesthesiologist would be available when we chose her surgery date. Everything was falling into place. My brother is also a physician, and he arranged his schedule so he could be in town for the week following her surgery.

The week prior to her surgery, we were informed that the insurance pre-approval process had not yet cleared, and there was a chance we would need to reschedule surgery. The Altru crew spent nearly an entire day on the phone

trying to sort things out with our insurance company. I spent an hour on the phone with the insurance company advocating both as a son and as the Medical Director, trying to get any unanswered questions resolved. My father also spent an hour on the phone with them. It was clearly a very inefficient process.

Ultimately, the Friday before her Monday surgery, we were told that my mom's insurance company had not yet pre-approved her case, and we would need to reschedule. This meant that my brother would not be able to be in town for her surgery, and we had to rearrange the schedule of our cardiac anesthesiologist. But not only that, in the back of our minds we were worried that something might happen to my mom while we waited. It is very possible that during that time her aneurysm could have ruptured, or her aortic valve could have led to sudden death. It was not a peaceful wait.

After 18 years of medical practice, and now as a family member, I can clearly state that our insurance pre-approval process is broken. Something needs to change. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jonathan Haug, MD