

## **Shauntae Catina's Story** (Atlanta, GA)



As a girl, I felt so scared and helpless watching my mom suffer one pain-filled day after another. She had Crohn's disease, but it went undiagnosed and untreated for years. Thankfully, I was prepared when my son, and then my granddaughter, showed symptoms of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). My family is the reason I try to help IBD patients who just want to have a good day but can't get one. Their biggest barrier? Insurance-mandated step therapy.

I learned to cook for my family and care for my siblings at a young age. I needed to help my mom, whose debilitating pain often prevented her from getting out of bed. For 20 years, doctors told her the pain was all in her head. You see, they didn't think African Americans got Crohn's, a type of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). Mom never got the right tests, not until after her more fair-skinned sister was tested and diagnosed with Crohn's. By then, the disease had ravaged her body.

Witnessing Mom's suffering sparked a passion in me. I made it my business to speak out about IBD so that people in the African American community would recognize the symptoms and demand testing, so they could get a correct diagnosis, and treatment. I also volunteer my professional skills as a billing and revenue specialist to help people fighting insurance-mandated "fail first" policies, also known as step therapy.

Their stories are all too common. I recently worked with a teenager who experienced a stress-induced flare-up as she prepared for a college entrance exam. Though she and her doctor advocated for a biologic treatment that would best target her disease, her insurer required that she try and fail on a steroid first. While waiting to fail, her disease progressed. She went from a healthy 135 pounds to 85 in a matter of weeks. She lost her hair, her face puffed up, and she lost control of her body. She should have been enjoying her senior year, but instead she finished high school in isolation at home.

So far, my 11-year-old granddaughter has been lucky, as her IBD is controlled with diet and exercise. But too many IBD patients suffer, knowing an insurance-mandated protocol stands in the way of their health, and their ability to enjoy a good day. That's why I'm joining the Crohn's & Colitis Foundation in raising awareness of the Georgia-passed step therapy reform laws, and calling for the U.S. Congress to pass step therapy reform, so that all patients with private insurance have access to an expedient and medically reasonable appeals process.

Learn more at [www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/steptherapy](http://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/steptherapy).