

By Administrator

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The UNC Health Care System, Nash UNC Health Care, and contractors are accused of systematically discriminating against blind patients in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act, and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act according to a lawsuit filed by Disability Rights North Carolina. The lawsuit, brought by the National Federation of the Blind and Disability Rights North Carolina along with individual blind plaintiffs, alleges that blind patients do not receive critical communications in alternate formats - such as Braille, large print, or electronic documents - only standard print. This causes financial and personal hardships for blind patients and does not allow them to keep their medical information private.

For instance, according to the lawsuit, Plaintiff John Bone is a blind patient who visited Nash General Hospital for emergency medical care services on two separate occasions. Each visit, he informed the hospital that he was blind and needed to receive all his medical bills in Braille. Mr. Bone instead received all the bills in print, and he did not know how much money he owed or even to whom he owed money until collection agencies pursued and threatened him. Mr. Bone seeks to receive medical bills in Braille, so he can pay his bills without accruing late fees, enduring harassment from creditors, and having his credit score needlessly damaged.

Another plaintiff named in the lawsuit visits a UNC Health Care provider at least once every six months and needs documents formatted in large print in order to read them. During his medical visits, he is forced to sign forms he cannot read and receives visit summaries, follow-up medical instructions, and bills all in standard print. This patient often must share personal medical information with third parties to understand and follow medical instructions. He seeks to keep his medical information private, which he can do if he received documents in large print.

“Blind people need and deserve the same privacy and independence in managing our healthcare that sighted patients take for granted,” said Mark Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the Blind. “In some cases, the ability to receive information in formats we can use can make a life-or-death difference. With today’s technology, providing bills, medical records, and treatment instructions in alternative formats is readily achievable, and all providers have a moral and legal obligation to do so.”

“We are representing blind individuals in North Carolina because the failure to effectively communicate with them violates their legal rights, increases their chances of incurring fines and damaging their credit scores, disregards their need for independence and privacy, and puts their very health at risk,” said Virginia Knowlton Marcus, Executive Director of Disability Rights NC, and “health care providers have the responsibility to know and do better.”

The plaintiffs are represented by the attorneys of Disability Rights NC and the Baltimore law

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firm of Brown, Goldstein & Levy LLP.