

Lisa M. Krieger -- Health care entry

Two excellent stories by Lisa M. Krieger showcased in a rich digital display illustrate in very different ways the breadth and human costs of medical issues facing people today.

One follows a young woman, suffering from a debilitating and incurable neurological disease, as she offers herself as a pioneering guinea pig for a promising and risky gene editing tool called CRISPR. The second follows a woman caring for her husband who has dementia, in an effort to highlight not only the devastating emotional toll, but also the ruinous financial costs of a progressive brain disease that insurance and Medicare does not cover.

Treating genetic disease: is a cure a cut away?

Until she met Delaney Van Riper, a 19-year-old with rail-thin legs and withered hands, Lisa had written about CRISPR solely as a remarkable lab tool with potentially life-altering results. Van Riper invited Lisa to document her role in helping move gene editing from the lab bench to the bedside, as noted scientists experimented with her donated cells to fix an errant gene.

Lisa used her journey -- through extensive interviews, videos, photos and a graphic -- as a way to explain the complex science: how a single mutation leads to disease, how sequencing can find this mutation and how CRISPR's "gene surgery" might someday offer a therapeutic fix.

The story captured the human spirit, describing how Delaney, resilient and resourceful, has devised new ways to open jars, type and walk without stumbling; telling of her frustration, but also her yearning to help, even though the technology might be perfected too late to help her.

How dementia can drain a family's life savings:

Through interviews, graphics, photos and videos, Lisa sought to start a dialogue about a tragic, less-publicized aspect of dementia: the lack of insurance coverage that can leave families destitute. To do that, Lisa told the story of Linda Winters, who gave up her career to become a devoted, round-the-clock caregiver for her husband diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

Although Medicare is a lifeline for seniors and the disabled, paying for hospitalization, surgery, chemotherapy, transplants, medications, pacemakers and other interventions, it won't pay for at-home caregiving or a memory care facility, placing the financial, physical and emotional burden on family members.

Lisa asked Linda to share her family's private financial records, interviewed geriatricians and researchers, including the lead author of the only academic analysis of out-of-pocket costs for dementia patients. She worked with the Alzheimer's Association of Northern California and Northern Nevada to deepen her understanding of the problem.

We hope the judges agree that Lisa's deep and thorough reporting on the travails and triumphs of two sides of healthcare is deserving of the California Journalism Award for in-depth reporting.