

How health care teams can help people with bedbugs: a patient's perspective

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As a patient with very low vision, chronic heart failure, type 2 diabetes, weight management concerns and fluctuating hemoglobin levels, it is difficult to not have feelings of isolation, poor body image and self-blame that impact my mental health and wellness. These feelings also impact my honesty and relationships with my primary care team. Being afraid that I'll be looked down on is one of the main factors that makes me not want to share information with them.

that I shouldn't invite friends or family to visit. I was afraid that telling my health care team about the bedbugs would cause their visits to end.

Every blanket, sheet, pillow, towel and article of clothing I had needed to be washed and put in a hot dryer. Mobility devices, beds, sofas and chairs had to be treated not just once, but two or three times. Everything in my home had to be bagged, wrapped in plastic or tossed. As someone living on a low income, the cost

they read in my chart that I had been coping with exhaustion and stress from the bedbug infestation. When they return, they often lift their briefcase or purse off the floor, have booties over their footwear and look at me nervously before stating, "I see on your chart that you have bedbugs." What hurts the most is being fearful and needing to cope with these reactions from people I count on for support.

Bedbugs do not discriminate. They are everywhere. Being prepared, educated, and adopting precautions, rather than being shocked, would be helpful. Empathy goes a long way. Mostly, though, patients need both emotional and physical support. This includes advocating for people with lower incomes who need letters from doctors to get financial aid to deal with bedbug infestations and related costs.

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Consent has been given for these perspectives to be shared.

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A few months ago, I disclosed that I had a bedbug infestation to my family doctor and nurse practitioner who visit me at home. Although bedbugs do not usually cause physical or medical issues, they had a serious impact on my mental health. I became sleep deprived from night bites and knowing that bugs were crawling through my bedding and clothing. I also felt isolated because I knew

of all of this was horrific. I cried trying to think where I would find the cash to purchase garbage bags or replacement items, or even to pay to launder everything. The work felt never-ending. I spent weeks checking for any signs of infestation.

It has been months since the bedbug problem was eradicated. Even now, when I have appointments with specialists, they often stand up and leave the room when