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Insurance Pointers for Students and Fellows Leaving CUMC

It is unfortunate that health insurance in the U.S. is primarily employment based, particularly as rising health care costs force many companies to offer less and less to fewer and fewer employees. What can you do if you will not be employed, or you will be employed part-time in a position that does not offer health insurance, and you do not have a spouse or domestic partner who can cover you.

Student health insurance is not employment based, so there are no COBRA provisions. Unfortunately, you will not be able to extend your Columbia Student Health Insurance Plan after you leave. For those of you who will not register in the fall, *the expiration date of your health insurance is August 16 at 11:59 p.m.*

Options you do have:

1. If you have worked within the past 12 months, have a job with no health insurance, and meet the income requirements (less than \$25,125 for an individual), you may be eligible for Healthy New York. Visit <http://www.ins.state.ny.us/website2/hny/english/hnyeci.htm> to learn more
2. If you will be living outside New York State (and not in New Jersey, Massachusetts or Vermont), there are a number of temporary insurance plans, generally with exclusion of pre-existing conditions and more limited benefits, especially prescription coverage, but definitely low-cost. The following websites provide some starting points for finding a policy. *Be sure to read the exclusions and summary of benefits carefully to understand what you are getting.* It is also wise to know the financial rating of the insurance company. The big three rating services are A.M. Best, Standard and Poors, and Moody's. For A.M. Best, 'A' is what you are looking for; below B may be risky. The following sites can help you find a short term insurance policy.
 - <http://info.insure.com/health/shortterm.html>
The basics of short-term health insurance
 - www.consumerbenefits.net
Lists a number of different companies offering short-term insurance
 - www.GradMed.com
Specializes in policies designed for recent graduates. Underwritten by Fidelity Security Life (A. M. Best rating A-)

- Other companies specializing in short-term insurance include:

<u>Company</u>	<u>A.M. Best Rating</u>
Conseco	B++
Celtic	A-
Chesapeake Life	A-

3. If you are living in a state without short term insurance (generally because state law requires certain benefits to be offered by all policies), some of these tips may help.
4. See if a group for which you are eligible offers a group health insurance plan. For example, check the alumni association of the university where you graduated,* or a professional association you may be eligible to join. *(Columbia does offer a catastrophic health insurance plan for members of the Alumni Federation. There is a \$25,000 deductible, but thereafter it covers up to \$1,000,000 which does limit total liability in case of a catastrophe, although it does nothing to assist with routine care and emergencies. Call **212-870-2535** for information.)
5. Cost information on different HMO plans in New York County is available at www.ins.state.ny.us/newyork.htm. Information regarding ratings of different HMO plans and costs in all New York state counties is available at www.ins.state.ny.us/ihmoindx.htm. This information can be easily downloaded.
6. If you work part-time, and will be in the New York City area, you may be eligible for insurance through the "Freelancer's Union." Visit www.workingtoday.org for information on eligibility and available plans (all are offered through HIP, a staff-model HMO). These plans are not necessarily short term.
7. For a guide to finding health insurance in any of the 50 states, visit www.healthinsuranceinfo.org and type in the relevant state.

For a consumer guide to evaluating and buying health insurance generally (not just short term), visit www.ahrq.gov/consumer/insuranc.htm or www.ahip.org (click on consumer information).

The staff at Student Health Service wishes you good health and good luck as you leave Columbia University Medical Center. Remember to request a *free* copy of your immunization record, or recent pertinent lab tests *before* you leave. (It costs money if you wait until later.) Our best wishes go with you.