Tom “E.Z.” Goen spent most of the summer and early fall riding his modified Harley Davidson motorcycle across the U.S. At grange meetings, churches, gas stations and hotels, he delivered a message to others who live with chronic diseases: You can get help and live a better life.

Now 48, E.Z. was diagnosed with psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis five years ago. What started as a few spots eventually overwhelmed his body. He was in and out of the hospital. Massively swollen feet and cracked and painful skin left him unable to function. He went from owning a successful restaurant and bar in his hometown of Dyersville, Iowa, to not working and suffering from severe depression.

With help from his family, E.Z. sought help for his depression and was able to get treatment for his psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis through IowaCare, a state-run health insurance program for low-income people. He applied for federal disability benefits and now has insurance coverage through Medicare. Medicare is a federal health program that covers older adults and people with disabilities.

The medications have helped tremendously, but E.Z. now faces the dilemma that hits many Medicare patients. The Medicare Part D prescription program covers a portion of the cost of prescription drugs (in E.Z.’s case, 75 percent) up to $2,830. At that point, patients must pay the full cost of their prescriptions—known as the “doughnut hole”. Once drug costs reach $6,440, patients then qualify for more prescription assistance through Medicare’s catastrophic care program.

E.Z. has been paying for his medications with money he receives for disability, leaving him almost no income. As he traveled around the country talking with everyone he meets about the painful reality facing him and others with chronic disease, he depended on the kindness of strangers to keep him moving on.

“Everywhere I went, people were so nice,” E.Z. says. “I told them, ‘There is hope for you too.’ It really takes you down when people look at you funny and don’t want to shake your hand. Help is out there, but I was ignorant. So are many people.”

E.Z. worked with local newspapers in towns along his route, and stayed connected through Facebook and the Internet. “This journey was good for me. I gave up on myself for a while, but now I know I am going to make it.”