Lauren Oickle is a smart, outgoing 28-year-old. She’s on the verge of finishing her undergraduate studies in pre-med at the University of Washington in Seattle and preparing for graduate school. Her upbeat demeanor and easy laughter belie the struggle that has dominated her life for the last six years.

Lauren’s dad had mild psoriasis, so it wasn’t a shock when she was diagnosed with the disease at age 12. She treated the spots on her scalp, elbows and knees with topical medications. It didn’t seem like a big deal.

But after an appendectomy at age 22, Lauren woke up to what she says felt like a different body. The feeling didn’t go away. **A year later, doctors finally diagnosed psoriatic arthritis.**

The biologic medication Remicade, along with the powerful drug methotrexate, helped Lauren function again. Painkillers allowed her to continue attending classes. **But student insurance covered only 80 percent of her drug costs. Her father paid the remaining $500 a month for her prescriptions as long as he could, but his funds ran out.**

To get the healthcare she needed, Lauren took a full-time job at the university that covered her medical costs and allowed her to continue her education part time. She says it has been a struggle to perform well in school while working full time and dealing with the frequent infections that result from taking medications that suppress her immune system.

Though she had always dreamed of becoming a doctor, Lauren has decided instead to pursue graduate studies in neuropsychology, where she will have more flexibility to deal with her health. But she wonders how she’ll pay for her medications when she stops working full time.

“That’s the hardest part. I have had to sacrifice part of my dream for the situation I am in,” she says. “I am being trained in the medical community. **Finishing my education is of benefit to society. There should be other options.**”

While she’s not sure what reforms are needed, Lauren is passionate about educating others about the implications diseases like psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis have on the lives of young people.

“I don’t have the stability of an adult life yet. Now [my health] is a factor in deciding my career, in choosing a partner, in deciding where we are going to live. I look like a healthy, active young woman, but I am on 15 or 20 medications. Everything is four or five times more complicated for me.”