

# Research Brief

Implications from Research Results  
Presented at the September 2003  
OHREC Public Meeting



## Changes in Access to Primary Care for Oregon Health Plan Beneficiaries and the Uninsured: A Preliminary Report Based on OHSU Emergency Department Data

To better understand the implications of forced cutbacks in the Oregon Health Plan, a short-term pilot study of Oregon Health and Science University Hospital's Emergency Department is in progress. The study does not control for environmental factors taking place simultaneously with Oregon Health Plan cutbacks-loss of commercial health insurance because of unemployment and/or decreased availability of health care providers caring for insured patients, changes in the overall health care delivery system. This study will continue to examine OHSU's emergency department (ED) data over a year's time, and dependent on additional funding, will expand the study to other EDs around Oregon for a more comprehensive picture.

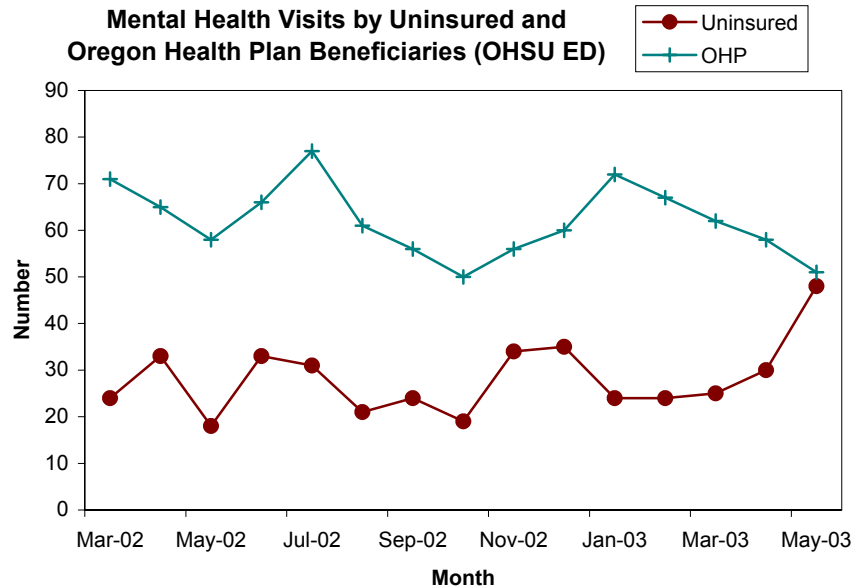
### Some Preliminary Findings from OHSU Emergency Department

- ◆ 17 percent increase in patients without insurance
- ◆ 20 percent reduction in the number of OHP patients
- ◆ 136 percent increase in alcohol-related visits by patients without insurance
- ◆ 200 percent increase in chemical dependency visits by patients without insurance
- ◆ 37 percent increase in other mental health visits by patients without insurance
- ◆ There were no significant changes in the proportions of ED visits classified as primary-care treatable, potential avoidable, or unavoidable emergency among either OHP beneficiaries or the uninsured.

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*OHREC is a unique collaborative of Oregon health services researchers, state agencies, stakeholders and advocates sharing and studying the impact of changes to the Oregon Health Plan. OHREC is designed to facilitate communication of research findings to policymakers, both statewide and nationally. Initial funding for the formation of the collaborative has been through Oregon's Robert Wood Johnson State Coverage Initiatives Grant through the Office of Oregon Health Policy and Research.*

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## Policy Implications

This preliminary data raises more questions yet to be answered:

- ◆ What role has the Oregon's persistently high unemployment rate played in these changes?
- ◆ What role has the cut to OHP Standard's outpatient mental health and chemical dependency services played in these preliminary findings?
- ◆ What role has the newly implemented premiums and co-payments for the OHP Standard population played?

Since Emergency Department utilization rates have been shown to be a good measure of access to primary care, the data does raise concerns:

- ◆ Increased ED use by the uninsured, especially for behavioral health problems, points to an urgent need to provide access to care for this population.

### *Methodology Used?*

Preliminary data analyzed the first three months after the OHP changes, comparing ED use to the same months a year previously at one hospital, OHSU. Insurance status, type of care, and analysis of whether the problem could have been prevented with earlier access to primary care was performed. Ongoing data collection is in progress, with a final report due by early 2004.

### *Who supported the study?*

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### *Authors:*

Robert Lowe, MD, MPH,  
K. John McConnell, PhD,  
Jodi Lapidus, PhD,  
Cody Weathers, BS,  
Annette Adams, MPH,  
Beverly Bauman, MD

### *For more information contact:*

Tina Edlund  
[Tina.edlund@state.or.us](mailto:Tina.edlund@state.or.us)  
(503) 731-3005 Ext. 646

Lisa Krois  
[Lisa.krois@state.or.us](mailto:Lisa.krois@state.or.us)  
(503) 731-3005 Ext. 354