

Better health, better care, lower costs

Why it matters for Oregon

Improving health and lowering costs through “Living Well” program



Across Oregon, communities are working to address the suffering and expense that come with chronic diseases.

More than 1.5 million Oregonians, about 61 percent of adults, have a

chronic health condition such as arthritis, asthma, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure or high cholesterol, or have experienced a stroke. The cost of chronic condition-related hospitalizations is estimated to exceed \$2.2 billion a year statewide.

Laura Swanson of Newport suffers from multiple chronic health conditions, including asthma and diabetes. Her conditions left her severely fatigued until she began taking part in Living Well with Chronic Conditions, an evidence-based program that showed her how to manage these conditions –

putting her in control of her health, her life.

“My life turned around 180 degrees,” Swanson said.

Living Well with Chronic Conditions is offered in 27 Oregon counties. Participants attend workshops and learn appropriate exercise techniques, how to deal with fatigue, frustration and depression, how to evaluate new treatments, and how to practice healthful eating.

Most participants who complete the program spend fewer days in the hospital and have fewer outpatient and emergency department visits, according to an Oregon State University College of Health and Human Services report. They also experience improvements in their overall health and quality of life, energy level, and ability to participate in life’s activities. The report further estimates statewide savings of \$6.5 million in hospital costs.

For Oregon doctor, the future of coordinated health care is already here

Portland doctor Nick Gideonse was concerned that rising costs and mounting paperwork were making family medicine unsustainable. But a 2006 visit to Alaska’s Southcentral Foundation offered a model of coordinated care with an emphasis on prevention and better management of chronic diseases.

“I saw a model that could again feel successful, that put us in alliance with our patients,” Gideonse says.

Back in Portland, Gideonse oversaw big changes at his own clinic, including moving to a team-based approach, setting up regular group sessions to help patients manage chronic diseases, and saving room in doctors’ schedules to allow same-day

appointments so patients can get help right away and avoid expensive emergency room visits. Hospitalization rates and charges have declined significantly for Gideonse’s clinic and others like it since 2007, according to a study by CareOregon.



The changes didn’t happen overnight, but five years later, Gideonse says he’s happy with the result. “I know I feel much more effective in my work and much more supported. And I would never go back.”

Dental care in the right place and time essential to coordinated care

Dental treatment in the ER -- inefficient, costly and untimely -- is a sign of missed opportunity for preventive health and a failure for coordinated care.

Unfortunately, it happens a lot.

For example, 2,085 patients of a leading Lane County medical group went to hospital emergency rooms for dental problems last year, accounting for more than 4 percent of the group's ER visits. The most common diagnosis was tooth decay -- the most preventable of chronic diseases in adults and children.

"ERs are not the place to go for dental care," says Dr. John Sattenspiel, chief medical officer of Lane Individual Practice Association (LIPA), a Eugene-based medical group. "All they can do is something



temporizing" -- such as prescribe antibiotics for a presumed infection or narcotics for pain.

With preventive dental care coverage limited, many patients tend to wait until dental problems turn into emergencies such as infection, inflammation or pain. While the ER is the most expensive and least effective place for treatment, some people

end up in the ER because they have no regular source for dental care, lack insurance, can't find a dentist to see them or can't find a clinic with walk-in hours.

In a better-coordinated system, as in Oregon's proposed health transformation, patient-centered teams would help steer patients toward timely preventive care, including dental needs.

Weight loss at work gets results

Offering weight loss programs at work allows employees to save time and support one another while engaging in one of the most important and challenging efforts to improve health.

Last year, for example, Rogue Community College offered employees an onsite Weight Watchers program



as a free health benefit through its ODS insurance plan. During the first 13-week session, participating employees lost an average of 10 pounds apiece.

"We were able to support each other daily," says Cindy

Harboldt, a participant who works in the college president's office and helped coordinate the program on Rogue's Redwood Campus in Grants Pass. "We look forward to sharing our achievements, great finds of [healthful] food, and insight and suggestions on making it through difficult struggles."

Harboldt herself lost 30 pounds and is now within sight of the targeted weight for someone of her height.

"It's a great benefit," Harboldt says. "It's way more than just losing weight." Participants report that weight loss has helped them lower their blood pressure and cholesterol levels and reduce their need for prescription drugs.

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