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Health fee may be raised \$2

By TOM WOLFE
Of the Emerald

The Student Health Center Advisory Committee has voted to recommend increasing the student health fee from \$22 to \$24 for next school year.

The fee is levied for full-time students every year during fall term registration.

The decision to raise the fee came down to charging more or cutting back services — probably by closing the infirmary, according to Avar Long, health center director.

"We'd have to do something pretty drastic to keep from raising the fee," says Long.

At a meeting Thursday, 10 committee members voted for the raise, one student (Michael Connelly, ASUO administrative assistant) opposed and ASUO Pres. Gary Feldman abstained.

"I felt that the committee had a year to consider alternatives to closing the infirmary and those should have been looked at," says Feldman. He says he would prefer instituting user-fees over increasing the fee for all students.

Long opposed charging students for after-hour visits or stays in the infirmary because he said the cost might keep an ill student from getting needed services.

"Closing the infirmary is the first part of a disintegrated unit," says Long. In addition, the physician warned that closing it would corrupt the center's philosophy of "catching students before they get too sick. As a physician, I know that closing the infirmary would mean students getting sicker before getting good hospital care."

In opposing the increased fee, Connelly said, "I just felt that we need to stop increasing prices somewhere. People complain about rising prices, but no one is willing to take a stand."

The health fee had risen \$1.50 every year since 1974 until it went up last year from \$18.50 to \$22.

"Ninety percent of this year's increase is due to inflation," says Long. "Legislative raises are already set for classified people and faculty — myself included."

Salaries rose by four percent in April and another five percent hike is scheduled for December. In addition the health center has added hours for a part-time psychiatrist and a second gynecologist now visits the center one day a week.

Declining student enrollment has also tightened the center's budget:

"We live by the headcount," explains Long. "Enrollment was down to just over 13,000 this year and we budgeted for 14,750 full-time students," says Long.

A four percent decline in enrollment results in about a \$14,000 income loss for the center.

Money collected through the health fee pays for 80 percent of the operating cost of the health center. The remaining support comes from charges students pay for lab work, medicine, x-rays, allergy shots, special services such as physical therapy and miscellaneous charges for splints, bandages or other materials. Students are never charged for time spent with doctors.

Cost of keeping the infirmary open for one year is about \$150,000. Presently the infirmary is staffed 24 hours a day and can support up to 39 patients. Eliminating half the beds wouldn't save much because the infirmary must still be staffed around the clock, Long says.



Drawing by Jim Payne

Decompression ban still urged

The Green Hill Animal Shelter's controversial Euthanair decompression chamber may have expired, but a ballot measure to replace the chamber with more humane injections of sodium pentobarbital is still necessary, says Diane Yeager of the Committee to Ban Decompression Chambers in Lane County (CBDC).

The decompression chamber succumbed to a mechanical failure Thursday and won't be repaired for use. The chamber became the focus of a city and county-wide controversy last September when members of the CBDC questioned its humaneness.

The chamber, a large cylindrical machine used to kill unwanted animals housed in the animal shelter (formerly

the Lane County Humane Society) by suffocation, was first threatened by protest from the CBDC and then by a ballot measure to ban its use on the May 23 primary ballot.

The move by the animal shelter board at the height of a political battle is just a "face-saving device," she says. "That they would stop using it at this time is very suspect."

"On the surface it may appear that the problem has solved itself," Yeager says. "But the measure is still very necessary."

Voting "yes" on the measure will insure that the decision made by the shelter's directors is kept in the hands of the public, she says.

"That would make sure the matter

isn't left up to the whims of a board of directors again," Yeager says.

Although the costs to the animal shelter to make the change from the chamber to the sodium pentobarbital have been estimated at nearly \$2,700 a month, Yeager says the figure may be distorted to defeat the measure.

"That figure was derived from what the vets said they would charge to come out to the shelter and give the injections," she says.

The injections can be given by the shelter's staff veterinarians at low or no cost, Yeager says.

"If it were that expensive then it wouldn't be used all over the country the way it has been," she says.