

# Group plans to build AIDS health care facility

By Colleen Pohlig  
Emerald Contributor

In recent years, long-term health care for people coping with AIDS has been virtually non-existent in Lane County, but a new group has plans that they hope will solve this problem.

To receive long-term care, Lane County residents with AIDS are now forced to travel 75 to 100 miles away from home to the closest hospice, a long-term care facility, often leaving their friends and family behind.

A local group of citizens and medical professionals calling themselves the Lane County AIDS Hospice Services Inc. has begun making plans for a facility that would provide comprehensive health care to patients who need different levels of assistance.

"The general idea was to create a facility for long-term care and also a hospice, which is defined as a final place to take care of people with AIDS who are going to die," said Dr. John Redfield, a Eugene physician and member of Hospice Services Inc.

The program plans to operate on funds from the State Disability Services Division, as well as on revenue obtained through government, corporate, foundation, or private grants and local fund-raising.

There are only a few resources available for people with AIDS here in Eugene. The Willamette AIDS Council provides free information, education and support services for people with AIDS. Shanti, a local volunteer-based agency provides emotional and practical support to people with AIDS or HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), as well as to their friends, family and loved ones.

Emily Heilbrun, the client services coordinator at Shanti, has discovered there are three main frustrations that people with AIDS talk to her about most.

Although most people with AIDS carry state medical cards that enable them to receive medical and dental benefits, Heilbrun said many local dentists will not treat them.

"The dental aspect is a problem because there is a lot of red tape involved," Heilbrun said. "Plus I'd imagine the dentists who refuse to take medical cards do so because of the low amount they get reimbursed for."

AIDS patients are frustrated with the lack of health care in general for people with acquired immune deficiency syndrome, Heilbrun said.

Also, at least one pharmacy in Eugene has refused to give people with AIDS some of the prescribed drugs they need because the state cannot afford to reimburse the store for the full amount of some of the more expensive drugs, Heilbrun said.

AIDS is an expensive illness; cost of care may range from \$25,000 to more than \$200,000 during a patient's lifetime, according to the hospice group's report.

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— Dr. John Redfield

"AIDS is more expensive as the thing wears on," Redfield said. "People with AIDS sometimes have to take 12 to 15 different pills a day, plus there may be several visits to the doctor a month in some cases."

"If the person is in the hospital, it takes a lot of people and a lot of hours to take care of that person, so the amount could be very high," Redfield said.

In Lane County, the number of AIDS cases has more than quadrupled since September 1987, when the number stood at 13 cases. At the end of September 1990, 59 AIDS cases and 34 deaths had been reported.

Even though the number of AIDS cases continues to rise, there is still no long-term health care for AIDS patients in Lane County. One facility in Eugene that tried

to provide such services, the Carper House, closed in 1988 due to lack of funds and clients.

Lane County is "certainly behind" in getting a hospice, "and it means we're overdue," Redfield said. "I think we've been ignoring the problem of AIDS, and by ignoring I mean that most people still think it doesn't affect them."

Despite the increase in education about AIDS in the last few years, the number of cases continues to rise drastically, with statistics indicating a growing number of cases among the heterosexual population.

"The high school students especially are not giving any thought to the problem," Redfield said. "They still think it only affects the gay or drug-using populations, not them. They see the posters on the bus or at school but young heterosexual couples — it just washes right over them."

The attitudes of college students about the problem of AIDS is not much different from those of high school students, said Dr. James Jackson, medical director at the University's Student Health Center.

"There is evidence that states that more college students are using condoms," Jackson said. "However, on campus, they (students) still see AIDS as 'other' — somebody else's problem, and that is the highest-risk attitude you can have."

Many students take advantage of the Health Center's confidential HIV antibody blood testing, Jackson said.

"There are things that can be done to prevent full-blown AIDS like taking the drug AZT or other drugs," Jackson said. "So, there are other reasons to get tested than just to be sure — there are things that can be done to prevent the immune system from going down."

Another frightening thing is that AIDS is hidden in the campus population, Jackson said.

"It's a hidden problem on campus because they're (AIDS victims) going to get out of college before they find out they even have the illness due to the incubation period lasting usually ten years," Jackson said.

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