

Clinic merger deal limits care options

When doctors with Eugene Clinic voted to merge with PeaceHealth, the corporation that owns Sacred Heart Medical Center, late last week, they did so for their mutual benefit. However, their patients may be the ones to suffer, as medical options — and the diversity of medical providers — become fewer in the near future.

While not immediately threatening, it is troubling to see that, one by one, doctors and medical practices in Eugene are all slowly becoming part of the same organization. Just in March, 52 doctors from the Oregon Medical Group decided not to merge with PeaceHealth. However, with time, economic circumstances may dictate more mergers.

PeaceHealth may one day have a near-medical monopoly over Eugene.

It's true that integrating the Eugene Clinic into PeaceHealth will have benefits. As part of a larger organization, doctors will be able to work more effectively with each other to help patients and will have the resources of a major hospital at their disposal. It may also help to lower costs for patients.

However, potential drawbacks remain. As a Catholic hospital and health system, Sacred Heart prohibits certain medical procedures from taking place within the hospital, such as abortion and artificial insemination. With the Eugene Clinic becoming part of the PeaceHealth system, many have stated that these procedures will now be unavailable from the Eugene Clinic doctors.

It is well within the rights of PeaceHealth, as a free corporation, to determine what medical procedures will or will not be permitted inside its buildings. PeaceHealth shouldn't be forced to allow abortions to take place within its facilities.

Unfortunately, the fact is that fewer options will be available to patients seeking an abortion or artificial insemination. As would be expected with a monopoly, options for health care are becoming fewer and controversial procedures will become unavailable. While Sacred Heart Medical Center and its affiliated organizations are excellent medical institutions, a variety of medical groups are needed to fully serve the needs of the Eugene-Springfield community.

Like it or not, PeaceHealth, with its local affiliate Sacred Heart Medical Center, is becoming the main medical provider for Eugene. Unfortunately, the Eugene Clinic's merger will come with disadvantages for patients. While certain medical procedures will become less available with the merger, Eugene residents will find ways to get the medical services that they need and desire with some work and a bit of patience.

The merger will most likely have benefits for doctors and PeaceHealth, but the prognosis for patients is still uncertain. For now, patients will just have to learn to live with the shrinking health care options in Eugene.

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■ OPINION

Hemp legalization going to pot



BRIAN WOMACK

Oregon is known for its leftist ways. From a ballot measure that allows doctors to kill their patients to testing the abortion pill, it's no secret where we often stand.

In the tradition of non-right ways, some in this state are pushing for the legalization of something that grows under the right lighting and out of the eyes of law enforcement.

This, of course, is none other than hemp.

The stuff that future former presidents and current former Supreme Court nominees sucked up. (Sorry, I don't buy the inhale line.)

If you listen to the proponents of the legalization of the stuff, you'd think hemp was the cure-all to any ailment society might even think it has.

That's right folks. Hemp can cure brain tumors, sickle cell anemia, the common cold and ear wax build-up. You could also build tanks, construct stealth bombers and reconstruct the Eiffel Tower if you had to with cannabis plants.

The stuff could fix our economy, end poverty and bring peace on Earth.

Obviously, I'm kidding about the economy.

But those in favor of weed decriminalization would have us believe that the hemp seed is the "most nutritionally complete food source on Earth."

Yet even if this were true, my response would be, so what?

The biggest problem we should have with the stuff is the message it sends out when we start talking of legalizing

a drug.

The generation that raised the one I'm a part of was very much a user of pot. As mentioned before, even our President did. Pot was a drug that gained widespread acceptance.

This casual relationship with the drug has given rise to these ideas of legalization beyond just a few users.

Drugs, in case we've forgotten, are the scourge of society. The effects they've had on America can be characterized as nothing less than tragic. A foreign power could not equal some of the horrors that have been wrought here in the United States.

Reckoning: Drugs, the Cities, and the American Future by Elliott Currie points out, "The drug crisis is responsible for most of the rise in AIDS among children in the entire industrial world. In 83 percent of pediatric AIDS cases by the end of 1990, the children had contracted the disease from their mothers — most of whom had been infected through IV drug users."

The book points out how drugs contribute to youth delinquency. It cites a study among low-income delinquent youths in Miami. Ninety-two percent of the Hispanic delinquents, 88 percent of the black delinquents and 77 percent of the white delinquents reported having been regular users of crack cocaine at some point. More than one-fourth of the white users said they had used crack daily over the past 90 days.

I could go on. But most of us should know why drugs are not good, to understate.

And, drugs include grass, my friends.

I can understand how some resent having a reefer lumped in with drugs such as cocaine or heroin.

Marijuana doesn't have the same potency that these drugs have. But they still do have some of the side effects that a drug does such as memory impairment and may produce hallucinations, according to the book *Drugs, Society and Human Behavior* by Ray Oakley and Charles Ksir.

But what kind of message does it send to have the stuff legalized? Kids who have heard nothing but "Just say no," now can say "Just say maybe."

If we're talking about legalizing Mary Jane now, what will it be in 25 years? LSD? PCP? And will we be looking to cocaine and heroin as possible options then? Will we, by then, have some new designer drugs so potent that they will pale in comparison?

The point is that just because bud doesn't seem that bad when compared to other drugs, it doesn't mean we should just up and legalize it.

The most prevalent drug in today's society is alcohol. Alcohol ravages this country in the way of drunk driving and abuse in homes among other travesties it produces. It could probably be classified as more harmful than dope. But because it is so ingrained in our society, outlawing it causes some of the problems we had in the earlier part of this century during prohibition.

Because marijuana use is still not ingrained in society, we should keep it that way. Legalizing it would not help that problem.

Finally, it should be reiterated that legalizing herbs will likely put us on a slippery slope toward more drug legalization.

Knowing drugs' travesties, none of us should want that — no matter what state we live in.

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