

Health center writes fewer prescriptions for antibiotics

Studies show many viruses aren't affected by the drugs previously prescribed often for them

By Sarah Skidmore
Oregon Daily Emerald

Students with bronchitis coming to the University Student Health Center may be surprised by their treatment.

As the result of an effort led by two health center doctors, the amount of antibiotics being prescribed by the health center has dropped by fifty percent since last year.

"Most students grew up in the age where antibiotics were the

common answer from doctors," said Dr. Paula Ciesielski of the health center. "Doctors used to see antibiotics as an option that might not help but they won't hurt. That has been the assumption for the past 20 to 30 years."

This assumption is not true, Ciesielski said. Overuse of antibiotics can cause viruses to develop a resistance to antibiotics and can also cause side effects in some patients.

After reviewing literature about the topic last year, it became evident to Ciesielski and Dr. Donna Scurlock that the organisms that cause the most common infections are resistant to the antibiotics frequently used to

treat them.

In 1997, the Journal of the American Medical Association showed that 47 percent of the patients diagnosed with upper-respiratory infections get antibiotics and that 98 percent of these infections are caused by viruses that are not affected by antibiotics. Antibiotics can have possible side effects including: allergic reactions, colitis and yeast infections.

Ciesielski and Scurlock reviewed the health center's charts and concluded that on average, antibiotics were being over-prescribed, Ciesielski said. Their primary focus was on bronchitis because of the high number of students that they regularly treat

for it and because bronchitis is primarily viral, Ciesielski said.

The doctors held an educational seminar for health center staff to encourage a more aware attitude towards antibiotics. The number of prescriptions for antibiotics have dropped by fifty percent following the seminar, Ciesielski said.

Although reducing antibiotic use may be beneficial, many students have difficulty with the change.

"Sometimes the message is that you care more if you give a prescription, but we do care," Ciesielski said.

Offering alternatives to antibiotics such as cough syrups or in-

halers and encouraging sleep and drinking fluids are some of the things that students may experience.

"We want to do something for everybody that comes in," Ciesielski said.

Reducing antibiotic use is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Viruses developing resistance to antibiotics is a national problem, Ciesielski said.

Sarah Skidmore covers the health center, counseling center, alumni association, AAA school and the business school for the Emerald. She can be reached via e-mail at sskidm@gladstone.uoregon.edu.

National campaign over union dues fizzles — except in Oregon

By Brad Cain
The Associated Press

SALEM — What began last year as a nationwide frontal assault on the fund-raising abilities of labor unions has petered out, leaving only a single costly fight in Oregon.

Motivated by the \$58 million labor unions sank into 1996 federal campaigns — 90 percent of which went to Democrats — Republicans in more than a dozen states had pushed for ballot measures and bills that would curb unions' ability to use their dues for political purposes.

But the movement slowly lost momentum, particularly after California voters rejected one initiative in June.

Measures didn't make ballots in Colorado, Florida and Nevada, and bills died in several state legislatures, including those of Arizona, Maryland, Mississippi

and Wisconsin.

Only Oregon will vote on the issue Nov. 3, deciding between two competing ballot questions in a campaign that's already raised more than \$2.2 million.

Measure 59, which is sponsored by GOP gubernatorial candidate and anti-tax activist Bill Sizemore, would prohibit public employee unions from collecting a part of workers' paychecks and using the money for political purposes.

Unions are pushing Measure 62, which would put into the state constitution the right of unions to use some dues for politics. But critics predict the measure will be tossed out by the courts because it also proposes other campaign finance reforms and state law prohibits multipurpose ballot questions.

Labor laws vary from state to state, but in general union officials may use a part of

dues on things besides contract negotiations, such as get-out-the-vote drives, campaign contributions and lobbying on labor issues like the minimum wage and pension protection.

Unions, like other organizations, may also create political action committees that collect money strictly for politics.

Most of the measures proposed have aimed to make it more complicated for unions to get permission from their members to take money for politics and make it easier for members to ask for refunds if they don't want to participate. Some measures, like Oregon's, would have banned the use of dues for politics outright.

So far, public employee unions have raised \$2 million to defeat Measure 59; they predict they'll have \$4 million by Election Day. The Measure 59 campaign has raised \$200,000.

Sizemore says the defeat in California, where labor unions spent \$15 million, has made it more difficult for him to raise money.

"The thought of being outspent by millions of dollars intimidated our support base," he said.

Nonetheless, polls show a majority of Oregon voters favor Sizemore's measure, although a union-financed television and direct-mail campaign appears to be eroding that support.

"Support for his measure seems to be dropping at a fairly rapid rate," said Jim Moore, who teaches political science at the University of Portland. "Sizemore might have a more clear message, but he doesn't have the money for a TV campaign. The unions can pay for a powerful ad campaign."



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