

Seeking medical marijuana for pain, Oregon patient feels shortages

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One-to-10 scales don't do her pain justice. The woman, only 40, enlists the help of her great-grandfather's cane to get around. The disease, a form of muscular dystrophy, follows a pattern of attack that targets her lower back, the muscles of her hips, her pelvic region and her thighs.

"It feels like your bones are just cracking and breaking," Dea Edwards said. "It feels like somebody's taking a sledgehammer to my spine."

To help assuage symptoms, the North Salem resident recently got a medical marijuana card. Weed doesn't completely kill her pain, but it does help her stop caring about it.

Edward's became a card-holder at a time when Oregon seems to be running low on legal marijuana. She recalled a time where she had to call five or six places and couldn't find the product she wanted, even considered heading to Vancouver, Wash., to buy it.

At first glance, it looks like the Oregon's pot market is thriving, with tax revenue gains — more than \$54 million through the end of November — cruising past official expectations of \$40 million for the entire year.

But a back-and-forth between the state and the industry about shortages and strict rules for testing has left less on dispensary shelves, especially for people who lean on the crop as medication.

Edwards is one in more than 68,000. That's how many medical marijuana program patients Oregon had as of Oct. 1, according to the Oregon Health Authority. Of those, 92 percent report "severe pain" as their condition. Marion and Polk counties saw a combined total of more than 4,500 medical marijuana patients as of that October update.

Sara Williams of Corvallis uses pot lightly. She hasn't tried to get any recently but has heard tell of "supply problems."

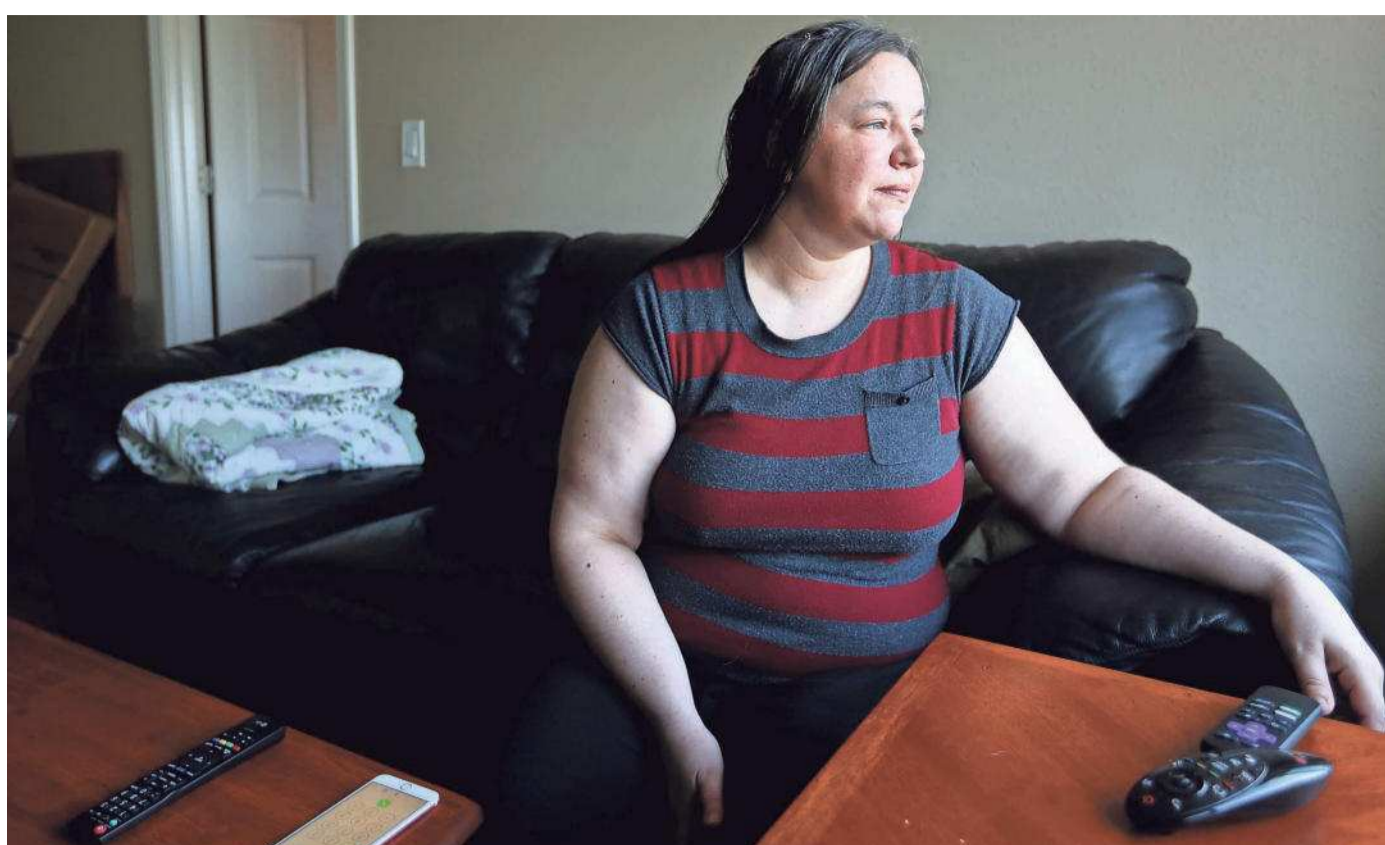
A self-proclaimed "lightweight," Williams, 43, said one to two vape pens will last her months. More a veteran of the program than Edwards, she's had her card for three years.

To be sure, the state Health Authority wants to keep people such as Williams and Edwards safe as it sets rules for testing legal marijuana, a somewhat new industry for the state.

Officials have issued health alerts over weed that fails tests for pesticide levels since new rules took effect in October. They just don't know what the effects are of smoking pot with pesticides.

To streamline the pot-testing process while keeping public safety in mind, the Health Authority last week revamped its marijuana testing rules for the second time this month. Oregon is actually trying to make it cheaper for pot to get tested and into dispensaries.

"These new temporary rules continue



PHOTOS BY ANNA REED/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Dea Edwards, 40, was diagnosed with a rare form of muscular dystrophy just before Thanksgiving this year and uses medical marijuana to ease her pain.

to achieve our goal for testing, which is ensuring customers are not exposed to dangerous chemicals in these products, while also helping to quickly get products to the retail market and patients," Andre Ourso, manager of the state's medical marijuana program, said in a statement.

But it's unclear how much pot dispensaries will have to sell next year. Beau Whitney, an economist and former marijuana executive, said dispensaries were recently "bleeding off" marijuana they had in stock that was tested before an October rule change.

"Now that that inventory is mostly depleted in the market and little inventory is available to backfill, one could expect a further decline in December tax revenues and even more in January tax revenues," he said.

Don't mistake the hip atmosphere of Homegrown Oregon — hoodies for sale, Homer-Simpson-with-a-joint art — for a lack of business acumen.

The Salem medical dispensary has largely sidestepped any shortage, having made sure to stock up with three to four times what it needs. But that hasn't stopped a waiting list of about 30 people who want a product called Rick Simpson oil, which beanie-wearing manager Alicia Smith said is popular among patients.

Some people can't eat edibles with sugar, and a lot of people don't want to smoke, she said. Taken by mouth, the oil provides an alternative.



PHOTOS BY ANNA REED/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Dea Edwards uses medical marijuana to ease her pain in her Salem home Tuesday.

Smith pulled a sticky note from a nearby computer screen with contact info for someone who reached out to Homegrown Oregon wanting Rick Simpson oil.

"I get a note like this every day at my desk," she said. "You know how heart-wrenching that is?"

Across town, TLC Cannabis Emporium, a recreational dispensary, hasn't fared so well. Small green "sold out" signs litter cases. Chief Operating Officer Corry Chain, in slacks and a loose tie, stands next to a tall display. "This used to be completely full," he said.

There are certainly goods inside. But bare spots show through like reminders of a deficit on its glass shelves, too. He hasn't seen the Rick Simpson oil in months. TLC Cannabis is just now starting to see edibles come through supply

lines.

Chain thinks the shortage would affect medical patients, whom the state allows his company to serve. Oregon Liquor Control Commission-licensed retailers can sell tax-free marijuana to medical patients and will continue to be able to do so after Jan. 1, according to commission spokesman Mark Pettinger. Sales of recreational marijuana are over at medical dispensaries at the end of the year.

For Edwards, the diagnosis of her disease came not too long ago: myotonic muscular dystrophy, which inhibits a person's ability to relax their muscles when they want to, according to the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

"I operate on a daily pain level of about 15," she said.

Her alternatives to medical marijuana are morphine and an oxycodone-acetaminophen mix.

"I've had to use my opiates and I don't want to," she said.

She generally doesn't like to smoke, usually opting for oils and edibles instead. She has some of those at home and ate a marijuana-infused taffy about half an hour before a reporter arrived.

To show off its effects, she practically leapt up from her couch.

"I feel fantastic right now," she said.

Send questions, comments or news tips to jbach@statesmanjournal.com or 503-399-6714. Follow him on Twitter @JonathanMBach.

Quake

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A youngster to the north also caught the vibe.

"We live near Drake's Crossing about four miles north of Silver Falls," Kristie Barnes reported. "My seven year old son woke up in the middle of the night and ran to wake me up telling me he felt his bed shaking."

"I didn't feel anything, so I told him it must have been a bad dream. Now after reading (a Statesman Journal online) article, I'm thinking he may have felt the quake," she added.

Barbara Miller, who lives in the vicinity of Santiam Golf Club, also felt a nudge from the quake.

"I didn't feel it very much," said Miller, whose home is near the cutoff between Sublimity and Aumsville. "It felt like a sideways wiggle, just like (earthquakes) I'd felt before."

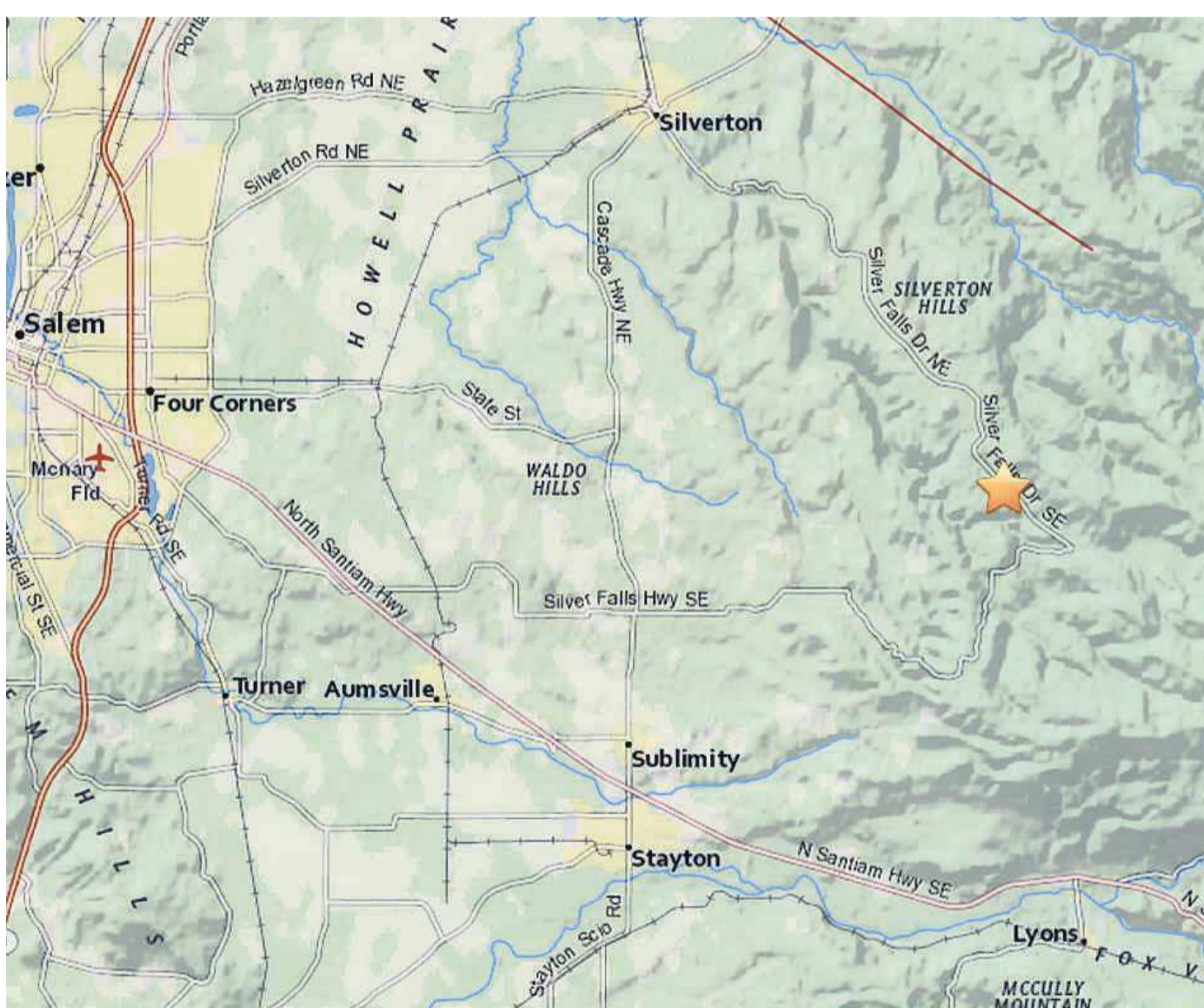
Miller said she heard a truck roaring by at about the same time and initially thought that may be the tremor's source. But after reading about it in the newspaper and equating it with previous experiences, she realized what she felt was the quake.

The experience also retrieved a college-geology studies memory from Miller.

"I've been noticing that all earthquakes seem to be on (roughly) the same latitude," she said, adding that when there's an earthquake on one side of the world, there is normally similar activity on the other side.

She even recollected the term for that — isostasy.

How's that for jogging the memory?



USGS

A small quake struck north of Silver Falls State Park early Wednesday.

Stayton

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points. We're talking about a consummate team player.

"He's a great kid, very nice," Kiser said. "I almost want him to be a little meaner on the court."

Stayton is an inexperienced team with

no returning starters from last season's squad that finished 12-14.

Playing in the Capitol City Classic — each team is guaranteed three games in the three-day holiday tournament — provides valuable experience for the Eagles heading into Oregon West Conference play. Philomath of the OWC is the defending Class 4A state champion.

"It's really a building process for our team, just figuring out how to play as teammates," Anundi said.

Stayton's most experienced player — senior guard Cade Nau — was out with the flu against Seton Catholic and the Eagles missed his ball-handling skills. But Stayton made enough plays down the stretch to prevail with Anundi on the bench.

Anundi has grown about two inches since last season, and he plans to add muscle to his 190-pound frame. College attention has not come his way yet, but that could be changing soon.

For now, Anundi hopes to build on his

early-season success. But it's all about the team.

"I'm just here to help out my teammates, so I don't really feel the pressure," Anundi said. "The pressure's equal on all of us. It's all of our responsibilities to play."

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