

Excess

Continued from Page 1A

Of those, 1,719, or 44%, were attributed to COVID-19.

The remaining 2,134 died from other causes such as drug overdoses, cancer, heart conditions and Alzheimer's disease.

But experts believe many of those may be indirectly related to the pandemic — people reluctant to go to the hospital or their doctor out of fear of contracting COVID-19, or a delay in addressing health problems due to prolonged isolation.

"I have been calling that collateral damage, the collateral damage of COVID-19, and that's been largely overlooked," said Chunhui Chi, director for the Center for Global Health at Oregon State University. "Actually, the collateral damage is way beyond that."

Deaths outnumbered births in Oregon in 2020 for the first time ever, according to a post by Oregon economist Josh Lehner.

One bright spot: Fears about spikes in suicides, particularly with students separated from their friends and attending classes virtually, appear to have been unfounded.

Low in COVID-19 deaths, high in other

Oregon had fewer COVID-19-related fatalities per capita than most states — it ranks fifth lowest in the country. But the state saw one of the highest percentages of excess deaths in the nation attributed to causes other than COVID-19.

A high number of excess deaths during the time of a widespread disease is not unprecedented.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the AIDS/HIV epidemic led to a spike in excess deaths in Africa as health resources were diverted from other health concerns to stop the spread of the disease.

"It's a zero-sum game because they're sacrificing all other health sectors," Chi said. "In three years' time, the prevalence of AIDS in Haiti dropped in half. That's a remarkable outcome, but the price Haiti paid was everything else in health deteriorated."

"That's exactly what I have been suspecting happened here."

Gov. Kate Brown ordered health clinics in Oregon to close in March 2020 to preserve the supply of personal protective equipment such as face masks. They were allowed to reopen two months later.

Such clinics are often the primary healthcare option for lower-economic residents.

The state also had some of the strictest stay-home orders in the nation, possibly contributing to people not seeking medical treatment even after clinics reopened.

Dr. Bud Pierce, a Salem oncologist, said his practice saw a 15% decline in patient visits during the early months of the pandemic despite not closing. He said visits went up again in the summer as the number of COVID-19 cases dropped and restrictions loosened.

Pierce said it was especially difficult for people in nursing homes in Oregon to seek medical attention as they were largely locked down for much of 2020.

"My sense from an oncology point of view, early on, people just couldn't get out of the nursing facilities," Pierce said. "There wasn't the energy or ability to get there."

Due to a lack of testing for COVID-19 early in the pandemic, some of those excess deaths also could have been due to the virus and never recognized as such, Chi said.

"How do you account for those deaths?" Chi said.

Spike in drug use, overdoses

According to the Oregon Health Authority, at least 339 people in Oregon died of drug overdoses in the state between January and June 2020, an increase of 40% from the same period in 2019.

The OHA said most of those overdose deaths involved opioids, fentanyl, synthetic opioids and methamphetamines. Fentanyl deaths increased by 92% during that six months, and methamphetamine deaths increased by 37%.

Similar spikes were seen nationwide. In the United States, there were about 90,000 overdose deaths in 2020, up from 70,000 in 2019.

According to the Oregon Liquor Control Commission, the state had record sales of marijuana and distilled spirits in the early months of the lockdown, despite bars and restaurants being closed.

"The COVID lockdown I think has led many people to use mind- and mood-altering substances, the illegal fentanyl, the illegal opioids, methamphetamine, the illegal opioids, methamphetamine, cocaine," said Dr. Paul Christo, pain specialist at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and host of Aches and Gains on SiriusXM. "It's due to the situation, loss of jobs, economic hardship. It's led many people to use drugs to cope. It's been a very,

very stressful year due to COVID-19."

During lockdown, there also was a spike in relapses, Christo said.

"I think it's due to the stresses related to COVID 19 and the means of coping with those extreme stresses," Christo said.

In the early days of the pandemic, public safety organizations in Oregon and nationwide also reported rises in domestic abuse calls.

Homicides in Oregon increased 18% in 2020, to 155 from 126 in 2019 according to the Oregon Health Authority. Deaths by unintended injuries rose 2% to 2,288, from 2,224 a year before.

Suicides decreased in 2020

Throughout the pandemic, health professionals, community leaders and parents have voiced concerns that an extended lockdown — especially one that included keeping school buildings closed — would lead to an increase in suicides in 2020.

But according to preliminary data released by the Oregon Health Authority, suicides dropped 11% in 2020 to 809, from 908 in 2019. The youth suicide rate also decreased.

According to OHA data, suicide-related visits to emergency rooms and urgent care clinics dropped during months most Oregon school buildings were closed and students were learning completely online, including March, April, May, October, November and December.

There were fewer than 400 visits in May 2020 compared with more than 600 in May 2019.

In January, Brown cited suicides in youth, including those in children ages 11 and 12, as part of her decision for prioritizing teachers for COVID-19 vaccines before seniors and those with preexisting conditions who were more likely to die from the virus. Oregon was one of the few states to move teachers toward the front of the line.

The Oregon Health Authority hasn't released a breakdown of ages for those who died in 2020 due to suicide.

When the Statesman Journal asked Brown in March about her earlier comments related to suicide numbers, she said she was referring to suicide attempts.

"In terms of conversations that I've had with superintendents, with educators and parents, there is absolutely no question that our children are suffering from the pandemic and not being in in-person learning, whether it's an increase in suicide attempts, whether it's depression, whether it's anxiety," Brown said.

Heart attacks, Alzheimer's, cancer

The Oregon Health Authority has not released a full breakdown of causes of death from 2020, but spokesperson Jonathan Modie said the top three causes are cardiovascular disease, Alzheimer's disease and cancer.

"As to why these are up during the pandemic, we can only speculate, but it certainly could be related to disruption of preventive services and access to care, as well as numerous stressors (social, financial, etc.)," Modie said in an email.

According to a data dashboard by the National Center for Health Statistics, of the 3,525 excess deaths in Oregon between Feb. 1, 2020, and April 1, 2021, 651 were categorized as "other diseases of the respiratory system."

According to the figures, the second-highest cause of excess deaths in Oregon was Alzheimer's, with 484 deaths.

Chi said when his father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's at age 80, he lived another 10 years due to attentive care.

"If you give the patient more physical activity and more social interaction, you can extend their life and their health," Chi said. "By those factors, I am not surprised there are excessive deaths from Alzheimer's. Had this pandemic not limited our interactions and activity, more people could have lived longer. One could say those Alzheimer's patients died of loneliness."

Other diseases with significant numbers of excess deaths in Oregon were cancer (423), diseases of the circulatory system such as heart attacks (361), hypertensive diseases (332), cerebrovascular diseases such as strokes (331) and diabetes (186).

During the lockdowns, efforts to help the elderly, disabled and the homeless suffered, Pierce said. That could have led to preventable deaths.

"When you get under COVID stress, we're not nearly as sacrificial as taking care of the old, the disabled and I'll throw prisoners in there," Pierce said. "It's hard for people to put their necks out when they're afraid of dying."

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Sentenced

Continued from Page 1A

Sentenced

something was going to happen.

A knife, a fight and guns

When he came upstairs, Bravo asked her, "Where's my s***?" and said, "I've got to go to range."

They exchanged words before he went to her side of the bed and tried to grab her.

The woman put her knees up to use her feet to put distance between herself and Bravo and push him away. She said the tactic is used in defensive law enforcement training.

Suver said when Bravo pulled a knife out of his duty vest, the woman called 911 on the landline. She answered questions from dispatchers throughout the struggle.

During trial testimony, the woman confirmed she put a pillow between herself and Bravo and he stabbed it once or twice while attacking her.

He put the knife away in his vest once the woman noticed their daughter in the doorway to the bedroom. The woman had to also hold on to a rifle that was in a case on the bed to prevent Bravo from unzipping it.

At one point, she grabbed both his arms behind his back and pushed him against a dresser to keep him from getting a firearm from his nightstand drawer. But he was able to free one hand and tried stabbing at her backward, Suver said.

The struggle moved to the closet where he began to hit her as she tried to prevent him from grabbing a rifle.

She was able to get herself and her two children out of the house as Keizer police officers arrived at about 10 p.m.

Suver said officers initially came into the home and began giving Bravo repeated commands to show his hands and come downstairs. One officer, who said he recognized Bravo from training at the police academy, tried talking to him.

Police eventually backed out of the

house, noting Bravo was wearing a ballistic vest emblazoned with the word "POLICE" and likely had similar tactical training and access to firearms upstairs.

Keizer police, Salem SWAT and Marion County Sheriff's Office authorities engaged in a three-hour stand-off before Bravo came out of the house.

At about 1:40 a.m., a Salem police SWAT K9 subdued Bravo and officers took him into custody.

'He wasn't in the right frame of mind'

Bravo's defense attorney, Jason Thompson, argued the sleeping pills Bravo took throughout the day led him to fall into a state where he was unaware of his actions.

"The question in this trial isn't necessarily what happened, it's why it happened," Thompson said in his opening statement. "Ambien is what led to all this."

Ambien, also known as Zolpidem, "is a hypnotic sedative that impairs your cognition, it impairs memory, and it impairs your motor performance," he said, adding it can cause sleepwalking and performances of action without conscious thought or intention.

Thompson said Bravo was prescribed Ambien due to long shifts at various hours at the Silverton Police Department.

"(Ambien) is an extremely, extremely dangerous drug," Thompson said. "If used properly, it can help you sleep. But, if you take that Ambien and then you have a reaction to it, crazy things can happen."

Both Suver and Thompson acknowledged the victim said she did not want the prosecution to proceed and asked for Bravo's charges to be dropped.

"I've never wanted my husband to go to jail or be arrested," the woman said while testifying during the trial. "I wanted what was happening to stop, and obviously, I was emotional at the time that it happened."

Court records show the woman also took a class for survivors of domestic violence through the Center for Hope and Safety, a class for those who wish to waive a no-contact order.

See SENTENCED, Page 3A

Logging

Continued from Page 1A

The lawsuit says ODF skipped a critical step, required by law, in analyzing forest types and ways to protect values such as fish and wildlife habitat before putting up timber sales.

"They just skipped a step because they knew it was scientifically indefensible," said Nick Cady, legal director for Cascadia Wildlands. "We also call out that post-fire logging is not supported by the best available science. Some of these timber sales are for very popular recreation areas designed to become older forests, and that we have aerial footage of showing that they are largely green and alive."

ODF said it couldn't comment on the lawsuit, but previously defended the plan as "balanced," noting that only 3,000 acres of 16,000 acres burned would see any cutting. In addition, they noted the plan prioritizes leaving green (alive) trees uncut while maintaining waterway buffers.

"Overall, I think this is a pretty balanced plan," Jason Cox, spokesman for ODF, told the Statesman Journal in a previous story. "We heard a lot of concern about being careful to leave green trees standing and that's reflected in this plan."

Within the 3,000 acres, there are two different types of logging proposed. Around 1,100 acres is proposed for "partial cut harvest," meaning foresters would focus on cutting dead trees and leaving alive ones intact. The

other 1,900 acres is "regeneration harvest," which is essentially clear-cutting standing dead trees and then re-planting.

"Even in areas that are clearcut, our focus is still to leave green trees intact wherever possible," Cox said previously. "These aren't green tree timber sales. We picked the areas that burned most severely."

The timber industry said previously that ODF's plan was too conservative and left thousands of acres of burned forest that could be turned into merchantable timber on the table.

"The reality is that 3,000 acres is less than half of what needs to be done to get these forests cleared, replanted and back into healthy working order," Seth Barnes, director of forest policy for the Oregon Forest & Industries Council, told the Statesman Journal previously.

Instead of leaving standing dead trees to rot in the forest, OFIC said harvest and reforestation is the better choice.

"There are millions of acres set aside for Mother Nature in national forests and wilderness areas. Let's manage these state forests to supply timber and take care of human needs instead of trying to set aside every stick of wood," Mill City mayor Tim Kirsch said.

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