

just health

Fair Share endorses health agenda

Current system dysfunctional, expensive. Dramatic changes needed, research shows.

BY STEVEN BAILEY N.D.

Quality health care which is both affordable and accessible is something that most people want and, in fact, need. While this is a clear goal of most civilized nations we are fighting a losing battle in many areas of American health care. While we have an ever-expanding number of dollars going into our national health care (over 350 billion dollars a year or close to 13% of our GNP!) we find more and more groups slipping through the safety nets and doing with little or no care at all.

The plight of the indigent, the poor (medically needy) and the elderly are so great in Oregon that special task forces have been looking into these issues for the past year to assist our upcoming legislature in finding solutions to these problems. Access to care in rural areas has also necessitated the need to research rural issues on health care. The findings of these task forces offer some constructive information but reveal a need for dramatic changes in order to effectively serve all these populations.

With the AIDS and ARC populations requiring extensive outlays of care and resources from the already overburdened support programs we can expect an ever-worsening future, unless changes begin soon. With the verisimilitude of Amandas' optimism in *Another Roadside Attraction*, I think we are just going to have to change our current system. It's not working and

we deserve better!

I have been attending legislative hearings, Fair Share meetings, Rainbow coalition meetings and literally dozens of other group meetings on health care in the past year and the recognition of our problems seem universal and entirely consistent from group to group. The proposed solutions also seem fairly consistent from group to group. The endorsed issues of Fair Share's health committee include some of the most commonly mentioned remedies for our current problems. These endorsements were formulated in the recent state Fair Share conference in Salem, (Dec. 13, 1986) and include:

Medicare assignments: Oregon remains as one of the lower level states as far as percentage of doctors accepting Medicare assignment at 27% (this means that only 27% will accept payment at the level reimbursed by the Medicare plan). The doctors that do not accept assignment require out-of-pocket payment by their senior patients which is a proven hardship on people with fixed incomes. Fair Share is looking at the Massachusetts mandatory assignment law which requires that all licensed doctors accept Medicare reimbursement. While Fair Share reports that the Oregon Medical Association has worked hard to oppose all the work that they have done in this area. Fair Share still plans to join other senior organizations in trying to change current law to guarantee affordable care for the elderly.

Consumer Choice: Fair Share has endorsed LC 556 (a non-discrimination legislative draft

soon to become a bill) that will prohibit arbitrary discrimination by insurance companies in reimbursing licensed health care providers for services rendered. Oregon is one of fewer than 10 states that do not guarantee insured individuals the freedom to choose their own licensed health care provider. This means that while you may have an insurance policy that covers service "x," you may be required to pay out-of-pocket for the service because the insurance company does not recognize the state's determination of licensure. For example, if you have a condition that requires a laboratory work-up and your family provider happens to be a nurse practitioner, chiropractor, naturopathic doctor, etc. (who are licensed to provide the tests needed), you may have to pay for these services even though your insurance policy states that it covers these exact tests! This is a condition that strongly prohibits our freedom to choose a health provider who is consistent with our own personal beliefs and needs. It also minimizes access to preventive care and by narrowing the number of covered providers is completely contrary to our free trade system which is intended to decrease cost and improve quality through competition. This draft is being carried by the Oregon Health Care Coalition and already has received endorsements from numerous groups, professional organizations and individuals. A copy of this draft is available from OHCC at P.O. Box 10943, Portland, OR 97210.

State Health Plan: This is a plan that would set up a state pool of health dollars which would guarantee that all Oregonians have health insurance. It would combine private and business health dollars with state programs and taxes to provide care which sponsors claim would be less than is now spent by the 75% of our citizens who now have some form of insurance.

The non-discrimination plan and the State health plan are two plans that have the potential to improve all areas of health care with a minimum of cost to the consumer, and would

therefore help in many areas of our current medical crisis.

Price labeling of prescriptions: This bill would require that pharmacies label their medicines much like our supermarkets label their food. Seniors and others who need prescription medicines would be able to find the lowest prices and also compare the generic medicines with the higher cost non-generics (often these are exactly the same medicine). Fair Share has endorsed a legislative draft which will be introduced by some other senior organizations.

Medically needy: Members of Fair Share recognize the need to dramatically change our current system of care for the needy. There are pregnant mothers with no pre-natal care and many families having to choose between adequate care and food and shelter. New funds are a given for the needs of the needy. How we find these funds is the major challenge left up to our legislators.

Nursing Home Improvements: In Oregon nearly two-thirds of seniors will have used up their entire life assets at the end of a six month stay in a nursing home facility. The high costs and frequent incidence of poor care leaves this area an extremely important area of reform in the near future.

Fair Share has moved away from their historic role of consumer causes in utility issues and now is working on a broad range of issues including health, taxes, toxic waste, jobs and other areas of general public concern. Now more than ever they are actively involving themselves in all areas of public concern. They deserve your support.

I think that the non-discrimination issue and draft is one of the most exciting things to arise in Oregon medical politics. It is a consumer issue that can truly change our freedom to choose and may well improve the overall quality of our health care for decades to come. If this is an issue dear to you, let your legislator know and contact the OHCC to find out what else you can do to improve our medical future. ●

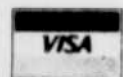
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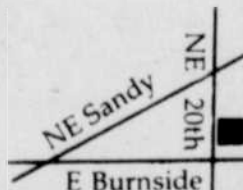
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THE COUNSELING ALTERNATIVE

Are you detoxing from the holidays?

Doing it alone is rarely effective. Many programs offer intensive support systems.

BY DR. CHRISTOPHER ESKELI

Was your Christmas one round of good cheer after another? Did you rock in the New Year high on drugs? Is your body feeling a little older and wearier? Are your emotions in the basement, your self-esteem too depressing to talk about? Are you having the January detox of your life?

Now comes that New Year's resolution. You'll turn over a new leaf, right? You'll get it together, get a new job, find yourself a lover, walk away from the booze-sex-drugs syndrome and start developing the "real you," right?

Well, my friend, that choice is yours for the taking, but you will first have to come to terms with the "past you." Choosing a new way of life starts with being completely honest about the old way and asking yourself why the old way is not working any longer. And in being honest you must look at the role drugs and alcohol have played in your life.

New Year's resolutions are a farce if they are not based on an honest self appraisal. That need to "turn over a new leaf" means there is something seriously wrong with the way things are now, that the quality of life has been greatly affected in a negative way during the preceding year. And will you be making this year's resolution only to give it up next week or next month? This year can be different. Maybe in the past

you have tried to live out these resolutions. Without support, few of us have made it. Now may be the time to reach out for the kind of support it takes to make this year's resolutions, promises, and the search for the "new leaf" possible and attainable.

The sources of support abound in our community. More appear every year and these gay and lesbian community resources are made up of the kind of people who want to help you, because they care about you. Would you like to enjoy some unconditional caring? Resources include calling a therapist to get some support in dealing with the emotional or relationship issues, or calling one of the 12 Step programs. Outpatient and inpatient programs provide a more intensive type of support system.

Whatever you choose, remember, you do not have to do it alone. You can make your New Year's resolution stick this time.

(Dr. Eskeli is administrator of the Right Step Recovery Program, a chemical dependency treatment center in Portland, Oregon for the gay and lesbian community.)

Where can you go for help?

Phoenix Rising — 223-8299
Live and Let Live Club — 231-3760
Right Step Recovery Program — 621-3201,
1-800-221-5390 ●