

DEALING WITH ADDICTION

Kudos to Richard Kidd for writing such a robust overview of opiate addiction [3/28], and the challenges we face in Lane County. Living through the hell of addiction lends further strength to your work. Thank you for your candor and your continued strength.

You raise several points about the problems that opiate addicts face when encountering the health care system — truths that are specific to Lane County and are probably generalizable to U.S. health care. While I cannot comment on the impersonal feel of institutional rules that govern a methadone program, or the frustrations of being an opiate addict with legitimate pain, I do hope to offer you some awareness of the efforts that are afoot in our community.

You cite Dr. Jane Ballantyne, suggesting that “medical professionals are incapable of addressing, much less accepting responsibility for, the mess they’ve made.” That may be true in many communities, but in Lane County we are grabbing the bull by the horns.

In anticipation of the Affordable Care Act, the Oregon Health Plan is undergoing massive transformations. The new model for the state Medicaid program, called the Coordinated Care Organization (CCO) system, offers an unparalleled opportunity

for us to rethink how health care is delivered in our county. Clinicians from across the spectrum are working very hard on the interconnected problems of opiate addiction and chronic pain.

Hosted by Trillium (Lane County’s CCO), clinicians from primary care, pain medicine, addiction medicine, psychotherapy, chiropractic, acupuncture, social work, naturopathic medicine, physical therapy and other disciplines have created a Chronic Pain Management workgroup. We are working to create guidelines to help minimize opiate prescriptions, evaluate individuals at risk for addiction and increase access to treatment for people struggling with opiate addiction.

We have representatives from PeaceHealth, Lane County Community Health, the Center for Family Development, LCC, Trillium and others, along with small and individual practices. Dr. Douglas Bovee chairs the subgroup on addiction services and leads the charge to train a new generation of doctors in prescribing Suboxone. We meet several times a month to talk about many of the problems you raise in your article.

We will be developing education programs not only for physicians and other clinicians, but also for patients struggling with chronic pain and/or addiction. Soon we will be seeking community involvement

in creating these educational groups.

Opiates are a big problem in Lane County. Let’s build a 21st century that is bright, despite the Northwestern gloom.

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A DAILY CHOICE

I am writing in response to the article March 28, “Getting’ Clean in Eugene,” by Richard Kidd.

While the article brought up some great points about what destruction addiction can have on a person, Mr. Kidd seemed mad at himself and at the struggle he went through to get clean and sober. If you have ever experienced addiction you know that this is no easy task. It takes great dedication to often put even a few days of abstinence together early on.

I am an addict in recovery myself. I am also a patient at the Lane County Methadone Treatment Program with two years clean. Twenty-six months ago, when I started, it was a yearlong wait. Today they are full staffed. If you can commit to calling in each Friday, your assessment could be as early as in four months. The information that Mr. Kidd spoke of was not his own experience with a clinic. It was second-hand information, told to him

by a woman who called herself “Sybil.” She also did not express which of the two clinics she was receiving treatment through. Her story was mostly based on the hoops that she had to jump through. It has been my experience at both of the clinics that if you stay clean, are on time and do the suggested counseling you will get your methadone.

Staying clean is a choice that an addict has to make daily. Let’s show some strength and hope with the experience.

*Sheila Wolfe
Springfield*

STEWART UNHELPFUL

Thank you *EW* for pointing out in two recent Slant columns [3/21, 3/28] that Lane County Commissioner Faye Stewart may be booted out in the next election. I hope so. It is outrageous that he has allowed, by doing nothing, the mining operation at Parvin Butte in the Dexter area which is in his district. *EW* has featured several articles about the loss of quality of life and property value for nearby residents as well as the ecological destruction caused by this money-maker for three of the commissioner’s business friends.

It may not be so well known that the Lane County Farmers Market is also in commissioner Stewart’s district. *EW* featured the Farmers Market recently

HOT AIR SOCIETY BY TONY CORCORAN

A Bold Move

DEMS CHARGING AHEAD WITH ‘PERS LITE’ BILL

As much as I dislike people who talk about themselves in the third person, I am beginning to seriously distrust the author of this column. Last week I bamboozled you into thinking that damn PERS bill, SB 822, went down the Ways and Means rabbit hole, never to be seen again until the back room budget deal at the end of Hot Air Society session in July. For any of my three loyal readers who actually thought I knew what I was talking about — think again. I was totally wrong.

The first PERS skirmish of this session should take place this week in Salem. Speaker Tina Kotek and Senate President Peter Courtney have apparently heard enough from the scorched-earth Republicans with their nasty SB 754 proposed by Mean Jim Green and the Oregon School Boards Association.

Keep in mind that SB 822 does not make the Democrats’ friends in public sector labor unions very happy, with its cost savings accrued in part through tiered cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs). SB 822 also “smoothes” out the employer rates by moving some of their debt into the future. The Republicans don’t like it either, calling it “PERS lite.” They are banking on a much nastier version of reform. Kotek, observing the dyspepsia in both parties, says: “We’re clearly doing something right if no one is happy.”

SB 754 is a massive attack on public employee pensions and highly unlikely to stand up in the courts. Not only does it go after the COLA more aggressively, one of its biggest cost savings is reducing the money match from 8 percent to 4 percent. According to the Milliman actuarials, this change would cut pensions of 55-year-olds by almost 35 percent and reduce the pension benefits by almost 30 percent for those who retire at 65.

Moving SB 822 now, with a current Democratic budget proposal that’s \$275 million out of balance without additional revenue — and without meaningful Republican input in the development of this particular PERS fix — is a bold move. It could produce an interesting vote count. Maybe a few Republicans will join the majority Democrats to pass the measure. Maybe the unions will spook the Democrats. Maybe the Republicans will vote against the bill as a protest. Republican House leader Mike McLane has already made it clear when asked about the supermajority votes needed to raise additional revenue: “We’re not interested.” Speaker Kotek has been

equally blunt: The bill is moving forward unchanged ... now.

I’m becoming a big fan of Kotek. She’s tough and decisive. One gets the impression she’s heard enough of the debate. When taking on these Republican male leaders in the House and Senate she has really shown a big pair of, um, I mean, she’s really grown a pair of, um, I mean they’re as big as church bells. Let me try that again: She is very brave and courageous. My lovely wife of 37 years, Jeannie, is a women’s health care nurse practitioner; in other words, she doesn’t really give much of a rip about us males of the world who hold up half the sky, to paraphrase an old feminist button. Jeannie thinks one of the weirdest idiosyncrasies of our language is to equate courage with men’s testicles. What Jeannie says about Tina is: “That lady has got some EGGS!, by golly. She ain’t afraid of any of them guys.”

Will SB 822 be the only PERS reform this session? Hard to say. Are Republicans willing to take the blame for failing to raise the \$275 million in new revenue necessary to get to the school funding number both parties say they want? Hard to say. But at least Tina has got the ball rolling, so to speak.

HB 2783 update

Earlier, I told you I would track this bill for you because of my opposition to lobbyist abuse. If you remember, the bill would create an offense of unlawful tethering of legislators by lobbyists, punishable by a maximum \$1,000 fine. If the lobbyist tethers a legislator, or leaves tied up in front of a Starbucks, and it results in death or serious injury, the lobbyist would face first-degree animal neglect charges, because, as we all know, legislators are not quite humans.

The bill is currently in the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee, where a public hearing was held last week. The committee would have voted sooner, but they got distracted by a bill that outlaws performance-enhancing drugs for miniature horses and provides for new bedbug secrecy protections. God knows they need them.

Tony Corcoran of Cottage Grove is currently a state employee and his observations in this column are those of a private Oregon citizen.

