Health care choice available in Salem

SALEM -- A new health care alternative is available to state employes living in Marion and Polk counties.

Capital Health Care is called a health maintenance organization, or HMO for short. It differs from the traditional kind of health insurance in that it promotes preventive medicine. Capital Health Care has been endorsed by the OSEA Executive Committee and, in March, it was made part of the state employes' benefits package by the State Employe Benefits Board (SEBB). The Kaiser clinics in Portland are an HMO available to state employes living in that area.

HMO's emphasize preventive medicine by providing comprehensive health, medical and hospital services to its members on a pre-paid basis. For a single state employe, all doctor and hospital services (except for a $2 charge for an office visit) are covered. The family rate is $96 for a family of three or more. The point of an HMO is to encourage visits with the primary care physician to keep the employe and his or her family in good health and to avoid the cost (not to mention the discomfort, absence from work and pain) of a major illness or injury. These services include annual physical check-ups, well-baby care and hospital and laboratory costs.

The rationale is this: If a doctor is paid a set fee and must provide all necessary care for that fee, it will be in his financial interest to keep his patient as healthy as possible in order to make the most profit from the fee.

Capital Health Care operates as an "open panel" HMO allowing its over 180 member doctors to continue their own private practice while participating in the program. Portland's Kaiser plan is a "closed panel" system whereby all doctors practice exclusively within the program.

The open period for Capital Health Care begins June 1. Coverage begins Aug. 1. More information is available from SEBB or from Capital Health Care at Suite One, 960 Broadway NE, Salem.

OSEA member and former District 11 Director Bill Thompson is a founding member of the board of directors of Capital Health Care.

OSEA 'roots' show in '47 journal; no recommendation on sales tax

Ever since last year's television sensation, "Roots," there has been renewed interest in our individual and collective pasts. And OSEA, like author Alex Haley, has an interesting heritage.

The May-June, 1947 edition of "The Oregon State Employee," found gathering dust on a shelf in the Association's Portland office, provides an interesting perspective into the early days of OSEA -- its problems and its successes.

According to the 40-page booklet designated as the "Official Publication of the Oregon State Employees Association," OSEA had about 3,500 members whose median salary was $198 per month. And one of the goals was to achieve pay parity with neighboring Pacific Coast states including California, whose employes averaged $210 per month.

Gains that had just been made by OSEA included the implementation of a retirement system for public employes and establishment of a 40-hour, five-day work week, although institution employes still worked 48 hours per week -- a reduction from the previous standard of 60 hours per week.

In 1947, OSEA's first group life insurance plan was announced after the passage of a law allowing payroll deduction for such premiums. Association growth was important to OSEA then, too. And to encourage it, the story claimed that "Every member will be able to save his entire annual dues by taking advantage of the many insurance savings made possible by the ensuing group insurance system."

An important issue to OSEA members in the spring of 1947 was a proposed sales tax that was to be voted on the following October. According to the story, OSEA ". . .is on record to support any tax measure which appears equitable and which will provide much-needed revenue to governmental functions without unjust burden on the taxpayer."

No recommendation was included, although an accompanying discussion of the proposed sales tax plan was generally favorable to the proposition. One of the advantages mentioned was taking the burden for support of schools, cities and counties from the property tax -- that issue is still with us.

While some issues haven't changed, some of the faces are the same, too. An article on the "Purpose and Method of Service Ratings" by Gene Huntley, State Civil Service Commission, appears in that issue of "The Oregon State Employee."

According to Huntley, now head of the Oregon Highway Division's Labor Relations Section, "In evaluating the performance of human beings on the basis of such traits as initiative, reliability, honesty, leadership, perspective, et. al., it is found that there are no absolute objective standards to afford an exact measurement of these factors." He goes on to say, "The very best to be hoped for is an experienced judgement."

We no longer have a Civil Service System or Commission. Instead, we have the merit system, an Employment Relations Board and collective bargaining. But the problems involved in dealing with "human" factors remain.

And perhaps an occasional glance backward at OSEA's "roots" will prove instructive in dealing with the challenges of today.

COL up for urban families

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Annual cost of supporting an urban family of four on a "low budget" rose 4.4 percent in 1977 to $10,481, according to a U.S. Department of Labor report.

"Intermediate budgets" went up 5.4 per cent to $17,106 and "high budgets" rose 6.1 per cent to $25,202, the report continued.

These figures are contained in the department's latest annual report on urban family budgets. Applying increases in consumer prices for various types of goods and services in various parts of the country, the department attempts to calculate a family's costs, assuming three different standards of living.

Largest cost increase detected in the survey was for medical care. At each of the three budget levels, the cost of medical care rose 9.4 percent, while food costs increased 6.2 percent, and clothing costs went up 3.6 percent. Shelter costs rose 6.5 percent for the low-budget family.