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ONE DOLLAR



Clatsop County Commissioners Kathleen Sullivan and Pamela Wev listen to a presentation from Pacific Power representative Alisa Dunlap, center, about smart meters.

Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Columbia Memorial deepens partnership with OHSU

A new seat on the hospital's board

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

Columbia Memorial Hospital is deepening its partnership with Oregon Health & Science University to help provide an economy of scale and ensure a stable supply of specialty physicians at the rural, critical-access hospital.

The hospital's board will add a full voting member from OHSU to serve as a liaison between Astoria and Portland.

The two entities will hire a chief medical officer in Astoria to direct clinical strategy, oversee quality metrics and help standardize operations.

"I think it's really exciting," said Constance Waisanen, chairwoman of the hospital's board. "It really enhances our ability to recruit top-notch doctors ... but it still allows us to be fully independent."

The new board member, one of 12, will bring a perspective of being a physician or administrator from OHSU and ensure good communication between the two entities, she said.

Nothing about the governance of the hospital will change, and there is no financial integration with the alignment.

"It's really building upon the success that we've had so far with them," Erik Thorsen, the hospital's CEO, said. "We see being able to do more of the same, with different types of specialties that aren't currently in the community, so we continue to improve access to care locally than having people leave the community."

The hospital has partnered with OHSU on several specialty services, such as ophthalmology, cardiology and telemedicine. The most notable has been cancer care, starting with a semiweekly clinic that has grown into the Knight Cancer Collaborative providing chemotherapy and radiology treatments.

The hospital has struggled to recruit physicians for its general surgery department and in other specialties such as pulmonology and urology, Thorsen said. Partnering with OHSU has provided more recruiting power.

"The general surgery program, we are fully now OHSU providers," he said. "All of the general surgeons work for OHSU."

Around 30 physicians employed by Columbia Memorial work alongside 17 others from OHSU, along with rotating residents and fellows. The hospital feels it can be more efficient if those people are all following the same policies and procedures, Thorsen said, while partnering with the larger

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County concerned about opt-out fees for smart meters

Dozens of customers have complained

By BRENNA VISSER
The Daily Astorian

County commissioners are concerned about how opt-out fees for smart meters could financially impact Pacific Power customers.

Over the past several weeks, dozens of people have approached the county commission and cities on the North Coast with complaints about the new meters, which are digital and track power usage through a secure wireless mesh network.

Some customers want to opt out of getting one, but feel the monthly \$36 fee makes that prohibitive.

"For a lot of constituents, that's burdensome," Commissioner Kathleen Sullivan said.

The project, which will upgrade 24,000 meters across Clatsop County, is part of the company's statewide effort to build a more resilient power grid better suited to adapt to renewable energy, said Alisa Dunlap, a regional business manager with Pacific Power, during a presentation to the county commission on Wednesday.

More than two-thirds of Oregon homes and businesses have already made the switch.

But some people object to the technology due to possible health risks associated with radio frequencies emitted from



County Commissioner Lianne Thompson asks Alisa Dunlap, right, of Pacific Power, a question about the new smart meters.

the digital electric meters. Others have privacy concerns, fearing their personal power usage information could be hacked over a wireless system.

These fears are largely unwarranted, Dunlap said. The wireless system is encrypted, making it difficult to hack. The radio frequencies are negligible compared to what is emitted from smartphones and other Wi-Fi-enabled devices.

"A 15-minute phone call has more (radio frequency) than sitting outside your

smart meter for an entire year," she said.

Pacific Power decided to let customers opt out of the program for a fee of \$36 a month. The fee was set to cover the cost for an employee to take a special trip to read a standard meter, Dunlap said.

But some residents, like Christopher Paddon, said the fee is excessive and prohibits many customers from exercising their choice.

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'A 15-MINUTE PHONE CALL HAS MORE (RADIO FREQUENCY) THAN SITTING OUTSIDE YOUR SMART METER FOR AN ENTIRE YEAR.'

Alisa Dunlap, a regional business manager with Pacific Power

County opens bidding for mental health contracts

Window closes in late March

By DERRICK DePLEDGE
The Daily Astorian

County commissioners voted Wednesday night to open the bidding for behavioral health and developmental disability contracts, inviting competition to Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, the county's longtime provider.

The new contracts start in July and cover mental health and substance abuse treatment and services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Bids will be accepted until late March. After the bids are scored

'THIS ISN'T DRIVEN BY ANY PARTICULAR THING OTHER THAN IT'S GOOD DUE DILIGENCE ON OUR PART.'

Michael McNickle, county public health director

by an evaluation committee, commissioners will make the final decision.

Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare, a private nonprofit, has long held the contracts. The county wanted to seek bids a few years ago after a management shake-up and public criticism of the agency, but heard there was no interest from other providers. County leaders believe the agency has made progress

under Amy Baker, the executive director, but understand other providers are now willing to compete.

The bidding will take place as Clatsop Behavioral Healthcare is again under unwanted scrutiny.

Baker was placed on administrative leave in December over her handling of on-call responsibilities at the crisis respite center in Warrenton. While she was cleared by

the agency's board after an internal investigation, the board chairwoman and another board member resigned in protest.

This month, The Daily Astorian reported that the state Department of Human Services warned the county last fall that it would pull the developmental disability contract unless changes were made to improve oversight of adult foster homes.

In unanimous votes on Wednesday, county commissioners agreed to release the bidding process for public notice, but did not discuss the reasons why.

"It's because we haven't done it in a long time. That is why,"

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