

# Chemo services cut at Ocean Beach Hospital

By **ALYSSA EVANS**  
*Chinook Observer*

LONG BEACH, Wash. — Ocean Beach Hospital’s chemotherapy services are no longer being offered.

In March, the state Department of Health did a routine survey of the hospital and found it wasn’t following federal pharmacopeia regulations.

“This is a really rare occurrence for us to shut down a program,” said Ocean Beach Hospital CEO Larry Cohen, who’s worked for the hospital since 2014. “This is significant. It hasn’t happened since I’ve been here.”

Regulations require hospitals to mix chemotherapy drugs in a sterile environment, with positive pressure and ventilation. This wasn’t happening at the Ilwaco facility.

“Those are three pretty heavy parameters for us to comply with in a hospital that’s 45 years old and wasn’t built to comply with new rules as they come out,” Cohen said. “We seriously looked at trying to do it but we just don’t have the physical floor pan to make it reasonably doable.”

Ocean Beach Hospital would have needed to become compliant with the regulations by December in order to continue its chemotherapy services. Since the survey, the hospital has tried to find a local vendor that could supply the drugs, but hasn’t found one. Ocean Beach reached out to hospitals from Longview to Seaside, Cohen said, and also looked into other vendors that could send drugs to the hospital.

“It became clear to us that from a patient’s safety perspective, shipping something in just added another level of complexity,” Cohen said. “In



Ivan Law

health care specifically, minimizing hand-offs is a pretty standard way to improve quality. If you’re not mixing the drugs, from our perspective, you lose the quality control.”

Cohen said losing that quality control “just wasn’t something we were comfortable doing.”

Because of the change, Ocean Beach has been referring patients to other providers. About 20 patients were using the hospital’s chemotherapy services; many have transferred care to Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria, Cohen said.

Ocean Beach is in discussions with potential providers that would allow the hospital to keep some medical oncology and related ancillary services, Cohen said. Services could include new patient consults, lab work, radiology and surgery.

“I wouldn’t do anything that didn’t regionally make sense,” Cohen said. “I’m looking for a collaboration with another cancer program that would allow us to keep as many nonchemotherapy services here on the peninsula.”

Deborah Bennett went to Ocean Beach Hospital for stage 4 cancer, which she sur-

vived. She credits Dr. Ivan Law with saving her life.

“The hospital dropped the ball here,” Bennett said. “This will take services from people who need it.”

Law, who provided oncology services at the hospital for the past decade, is retiring as of Thursday. A letter sent in June to his past and current patients credits the change as his reason for retiring.

“Due to these changings, I will be leaving the employment of Ocean Beach Hospital and Medical Clinics,” Law said in the letter. “For nearly the last 10 years, I have very much enjoyed working with the OBHMC staff in caring for your medical oncology needs.”

Cohen said it’s too soon to know what impact the changing services will have on the community. Aside from Law retiring, no other staff will be leaving, Cohen said.

“OBHMC is very grateful to Dr. Law for enabling the delivery of medical oncology services at OBHMC for 10-plus years,” Cohen said. “Medical oncology is a program that very few critical-access hospitals can offer.”

Ocean Beach will still offer infusion services, and accept infusion orders from local and regional providers.

“OBHMC will continue to provide the residents and visitors of South Pacific County with many high-quality, safe, financially responsible and ‘close to home’ services,” Cohen said.

This is Law’s second retirement. After more than 30 years in private practice, he retired in January 2010 from his bustling Portland clinic to take the full-time position in Ilwaco. For four years prior to that, he had been commuting to the coast, running a weekend program at the hospital.

# Group withdraws effort to refer business tax to voters

Money meant for education

By **AUBREY WIEBER and CLAIRE WITYCOMBE**  
*Oregon Capital Bureau*

SALEM — An Oregon trade group has announced that it will no longer push to put a landmark business tax to raise money for the state’s public schools on the ballot.

Oregon Manufacturers and Commerce, which opposes the new \$1 billion annual corporate activity tax, said Tuesday that lawmakers had passed barriers so significant to getting it on the ballot — including the date of election and how petitioners could gather signatures — that such an effort was “virtually impossible.”

“We’re extremely disappointed that lawmakers went to such great lengths to hamstring our referral efforts, but the reality is that they have rigged the system so far in their favor that our chances of success at this point are very remote,” the group said in a statement.

“Though we will not be moving forward with the referral effort, we will continue to explore opportunities to minimize the negative impacts of this new tax on Oregonians by any means possible, including through legislative action or a potential initiative in a future election.”

The statement referred to four bills passed by legislators in 2019, including one that more strictly regulates how electronic petitions are dispersed to collect signatures, and one that would refer the tax package to a January 2020 vote, not a November 2020 vote. Having the vote in January gives business groups much less time to collect signatures.

State Sen. Mark Hass, D-Beaverton, helped develop the tax proposal.

“I am not surprised,” Hass said. “I think the majority of Oregon businesses support education, and I am not surprised that businesses do not want to fight against Oregon schools.”

Shaun Jillions, head of Oregon Manufacturers and Commerce, said this in no

carbon emissions regulation program.

When those talks fell apart, Rob Freres, the president of Freres Lumber and member of Oregon Manufacturers and Commerce, gave \$1 million to a political action committee pushing the referral.

Jillions said he will talk with Freres about how to use that money. It can be moved to other PACs, or Freres

*‘WE WILL CONTINUE TO EXPLORE OPPORTUNITIES TO MINIMIZE THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF THIS NEW TAX ON OREGONIANS BY ANY MEANS POSSIBLE.’*

excerpt from Oregon Manufacturers and Commerce statement

way signals that his group is going along with lawmakers in supporting the tax.

Two petitioners, Marie Bowers, of Eugene, and Jordan Orht, of Silverton, have already filed paperwork to refer parts of the law to voters under the title Keep Oregon Affordable.

Bowers said Tuesday that they have no plans to stop trying to get the measure on the ballot.

It must get 74,680 signatures to get to the ballot.

Jillions said he would advise them otherwise.

“We’ll have a conversation with them,” he said. “In our view, they should withdraw the petition altogether, but we don’t control that process.”

If Bowers and Orht try to go it alone, they face a tough fundraising task.

After the tax package passed, Jillions vowed to try and take it to the ballot.

However, he dangled the idea of backing off a referendum to try and convince Senate Democrats to vote against House Bill 2020, a

could file for a refund.

Bowers’ and Orht’s PAC — Keep Oregon Affordable — has had about \$44,000 worth of printing and consulting services donated to them, but the account has a cash balance of \$100.

The Student Success Act is a measure that lawmakers have been trying to get off the ground in some form for years to support public education, in a state where students are among the least likely in the nation to graduate from high school on time.

“Great, great news for our kids,” Jim Green, executive director of the Oregon School Boards Association, said in a statement. “This announcement moves us one step closer to ensuring that this vital investment in our young people will become a reality. We will remain vigilant in planning for a possible referendum, but most of our attention is being focused on preparing districts for implementation of the Student Success Act.”

# State workers could get up to 15% raises

Associated Press

PORTLAND — Public employee unions representing Oregon state workers have negotiated new contracts that would provide pay increases of up to 15% over the next two-year budget period.

The proposed contracts include both step increases and cost of living increases in each of the next two years.

Union officials say the wage increases are necessary to maintain Oregon’s competitiveness in attracting employees after recent wage growth in the private sector. However, the Oregonian/OregonLive reports the most recent state salary survey suggests that state employees’ total compensation, which includes benefits, is already competitive.

The contracts still must be voted upon by union members and receive final approval by state lawmakers.

Gov. Kate Brown’s office echoed the unions’ sentiments, saying the tentative agreement was a reflection of her commitment to make the State of Oregon a competitive employer, particularly for employees who work in foster care, transportation, public safety, and health service professions.

“Since the recession first hit Oregon over a decade ago, state employees have

been asked to take low or no COLAs,” said Kate Kondayen, a spokeswoman for Brown. “Now that the economy is strong, we owe it to these hard-working individuals, and the Oregonians who rely on the services they provide, to help make up ground that was lost.

The contracts’ step increases in each of the next two years would average 4.7%. Steps are automatic pay increases that come with longevity in a job. It also includes the addition of a new top step, which would give employees who topped out at their job classification a 4.7% pay increase. Those increases would mostly go to older Tier 1 and Tier 2 employees.

The contracts also include cost-of-living increases

of 2.15% in 2019 and 3% in 2020. Those are bigger increases than in the workers’ previous two-year contract — and higher than the average annual increase of 1.4% over the last decade.

The cost-of-living increases compare to an inflation rate of 2.7% in the 13-state West Region over the last year, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. State economists predict it will remain near that level during the next two years.

Overall, the state workers’ wage increases would average up to 7.2% annually. Meanwhile, Oregon’s Office of Economic Analysis forecasts average annual statewide wage growth, including inflation, of 3.7% in 2019 and 4.2% in 2020.

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