

Health & Science



Kaiser Forms Pact With Unions

Kaiser Permanente has reached agreements with five unions representing employees who work at Bess Kaiser Medical Center in north Portland.

According to Kaiser officials, the agreements make it possible for those employees affected by the closure of the hospital to take advantage of preferential hiring arrangements with Providence Health System and Oregon Health Sciences University as well as broader incentive-severance benefits.

The unions ratifying the agreements include the United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 555; Operating Engineers, Local 701; the Oregon Nurses Association; the Service Employees International Union, Local 49; and the Guild of Professional Pharmacists.

The labor organizations represent 7,600 employees or about half of Kaiser Permanente's work force in northwest Oregon and southwest Washington. There are about 1,300 employees at Bess Kaiser of which about 960 are represented by a union, officials said.

Kaiser representatives said the pharmacists also ratified a new three-year agreement, which calls for no changes in benefits and wages during the term of the agreement. The Pharmacist Guild represents 210 Kaiser Permanente employees who work at 20 locations in the Northwest.

The nurses association, which represents about 400 nurses at Bess Kaiser, ratified a one-year contract extension, maintaining current salaries and benefits through April 1, 1997, hospital officials said.

"These contracts and the severance and re-employment benefits we developed for employees affected by the closure of Bess Kaiser, reflect our goal of balancing the need of our customers while meeting the needs of employees," said Thomas Williamson, Kaiser Permanente human resources manager.

The Oregon Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals, which represents a variety of job classifications, including respiratory therapists, surgical assistants and operating room tech-

nicians, turned down the offer of the effects of the closure.

Employees represented by the federation will not be able to take full advantage of the re-employment opportunities arranged with Providence and OHSU as well as the broader incentive-severance package, Kaiser officials said.

Providence St Vincent recently posted the first set of jobs created as a result of Kaiser's plan to use St. Vincent as one of its health plan hospitals beginning March 31, 1996.

Earlier this year, Kaiser announced that it will close inpatient care at Bess Kaiser Medical Center in two phases. Around March 31, 1996, the hospital will be scaled down to about 55 beds. Hospital admissions will be primarily for emergencies and low-risk obstetrical care.

Outpatient services, such as urgent and emergency care, pharmacy, lab and X-ray, will continue to be offered. But in 1997, inpatient services at Bess Kaiser will be phased out entirely.

AIDS Drugs Cocktail Offers Hope

AIDS researchers and charities welcomed the recent announcement of a drugs cocktail that offered a significant breakthrough in treatment for the deadly disease.

Britain's Medical Research Council announced that combining the common AIDS drug AZT (zidovudine or zovirax) with either one of two related drugs — ddI or ddC — prolonged the lives of up to 38 percent of HIV sufferers over two years.

"This is very good news for people with HIV and AIDS," said Nick Partridge, spokesman for Britain's AIDS charity the Terence Higgins Trust. "We are still a long way from a cure but these results renew hope."

The results were so overwhelming the researchers rushed to publish their findings while in the middle of the study.

"Our independent ethics board advised us to publicize the results,"

said Dr. Tim Peto, a specialist in infectious diseases at John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford, England, and one of the coordinators of the study.

Another coordinator, Dr. Brian Gazzard of London's Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, said HIV patients starting drug treatment should take the combination right away.

"We felt that in general doctors should know and the public should know this is true," he said. "I think what's clear is that people now starting therapy should start on combinations."

The so-called Delta trial, which started in 1992, involved more than 3,000 people with HIV in Britain, Ireland, Australia, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

They were randomly assigned one of three different treatments — AZT alone, AZT with didanosine (ddI) or AZT with zalcitabine (ddC)

— all similar drugs that attack the AIDS virus's ability to work and replicate itself.

Of the patients who had never taken AZT before, 17 percent who took AZT alone died, compared with 10 percent who took AZT with ddI and 12 percent who took AZT with ddC.

A second group of patients had been taking AZT already. In this group, death rates did not differ significantly.

"The combined results...yield a reduction in mortality of about 25 percent in favor of combination therapy," the MRC said, adding that the reason the second group did not respond as well was not clear. Peto said the researchers would be looking urgently at why this should be.

"A good analogy would be tuberculosis," he said. "If you take one drug alone it doesn't work. You have to take three drugs to get a good result."

Breast Cancer Drug Benefits Examined

A recent study provides more evidence that the drug tamoxifen can help prevent a breast cancer patient's disease from spreading to the second breast.

It also found no association between use of the drug and developing uterine or ovarian cancer. That possible link has been a controversy in determining whether women at risk for breast cancer should use tamoxifen as a preventive therapy.

There is wide acceptance that

tamoxifen, which has been used in the United States since the 1970s, is beneficial for women who already have breast cancer, but studies are still underway to determine which women would benefit from a preventive regimen.

The study led by Linda Cook, a researcher at the Fred Hutchinson Research Center in Seattle, found up to a 60 percent reduction in risk for cancer in the opposite breast. Average treatment was less than two years.

Her study analyzed data on more

than 12,500 breast cancer cases from 1978 to 1990. The results appear in Wednesday's edition of the Journal of the National Cancer Institute.

In an accompanying editorial, Trevor Powles and Tamas Hickish of Britain's Royal Marsden Hospital in Sutton, Surrey, recommended that tamoxifen be used as a preventive medication only in high-risk women enrolled in clinical trials until more is known about whether it can increase the risk of cancer in other organs.

Report Praises Wine's Health Benefits

So many beneficial effects have been found from drinking wine in moderation that its alcoholic content may be better defined as a nutrient than a drug, a researcher said last week.

"Ethanol increases the level of the so-called 'good' HDL cholesterol," Linda Bisson of the University of California at Davis said. "However the effect of ethanol on cholesterol is predicted to account for only a

fraction of the impact on cardiovascular health."

In a report delivered to the annual meeting of the American Chemical Society, she said the ethanol in wine should be considered a macronutrient rather than a drug. Both red and white wines, particularly Chardonnay, are beneficial to people with high cholesterol lev-



els, she said.

"The effect of ethanol on metabolism of other energy sources may in part explain its effect in the reduction of coronary heart disease," she said.

A separate report, also from the University of California at Davis, said red wine appears to delay the onset of tumors in test animals.

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Minorities Face Greater Health Care Risk

Blacks and Hispanics face greater risk than other population groups for chronic illness and premature death due to a lack of access to health care, a new study said.

The report released by the Joint Center for Political Economic Studies found that nearly one in four blacks and more than one in three Hispanics did not have health insurance in 1993, compared with about one out of six whites.

Low income blacks and Hispanics were also less likely to get routine medical care than whites in similar

income brackets.

The report "underscores the importance of considering the needs of racial and ethnic minority groups as the nation's health care system continues to undergo rapid change," said Eddie Williams, president of the center.

"On balance, it is as important to increase access to care as it is to curb costs," he added.

The center drew on research by the Commonwealth Fund and Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health to examine health problems and access to health care.

Pain may be eliminated for millions

(SPECIAL)—A new drug has been approved that is exciting researchers in the treatment of pain. This material has been formulated into a new product known as "Arthur Itis™" and is being called a "Medical Miracle" by some, in the treatment of debilitating conditions such as arthritis, bursitis, rheumatism, painful muscle aches, joint aches, simple backache, bruises, and more. Although the mechanism of action is unclear, experiments indicate that Arthur Itis™ relieves pain by first selectively attracting, and then destroying the messenger chemical which carries pain sensations to the brain, thus eliminating pain in the affected area. Arthur Itis™ is an odorless, greaseless, non-staining cream and is available immediately without a prescription and is guaranteed to work.

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Human Rights Award Recipient

Continued from Metro

appropriate treatments as well as traditional Western medical practices. "You have to provide medical care in a way that fits in with a person's heritage and experience. If a person doesn't take a medicine because they don't understand it, or because you have lost their trust by discounting treatments their culture has used for centuries, then the medicine won't do them any good."

Mariah Taylor also serves on the Headstart Advisory Committee, and is on the board of the Cultural Recreation Band, which replaces the weapons in gang members' hands with musical instruments. Over 125 children are currently enrolled in the Cultural Recreation Band.

The awards will be presented at the MHRC Awards Dinner, Thursday, October 26, at the Beaumont Middle School, 4043 NE Fremont, from 6:30 P.M. to 9:00 P.M. Tickets are \$12, and reservations can be made by calling 823-5136.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO PREVENT HOME FIRES...

SMOKE DETECTORS

- Install at least one smoke detector outside every bedroom and on every level of your home.
- Check the batteries monthly and replace them at least once a year.

PORTABLE HEATERS

- Keep blankets, clothing, curtains, furniture and anything that could get hot and catch fire away from portable heaters.
- Plug heaters directly into the wall socket and unplug them when they are not in use.

SAFE COOKING PRACTICES

- Keep items away from the stove that could catch fire, such as towels, clothing and curtains.
- Keep a fire extinguisher in the kitchen, and get training from the fire department in how to use it.

ELECTRICITY

- Use safety plugs in electrical outlets, especially if you have small children.
- Avoid overloading electrical outlets and running cords under carpet and furniture.

GENERAL SAFETY HABITS

- Never smoke in bed.
- Keep matches and lighters away from children.

FIRE ESCAPE DRILLS

- Plan and practice fire escape routes and make sure everyone knows two ways out of every room.
- Have a plan to escape if bars cover windows.
- Use a chain ladder to escape from upper levels and practice escaping with it.
- Teach children that firefighters are their friends, and they will help in case of a fire.
- Identify a place outside to meet in case of a fire.
- Know how to call for emergency assistance.

WHAT TO DO IN CASE OF A FIRE...

USING YOUR ESCAPE PLAN

- Crawl low, under the smoke.
- Feel closed doors with the back of your hand. If hot, use another exit. If not hot, open the door slowly and check for smoke and fire.
- Meet at the designated meeting place outside, then call for help. Never return to a burning building.



Federal Emergency Management Agency

United States Fire Administration



American Red Cross

National SAFE KIDS WEEK Campaign

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