

Health & Science



Prisoners seek state-paid abortions

Inmates in Colorado prisons filed suit on Wednesday asking a federal judge to order the state to pay for prisoners' abortions and seeking an immediate abortion for a prisoner who is 20 weeks pregnant, according to court documents.

The state would be imposing "cruel and unusual punishment" by forcing

the inmate to bear an unwanted child, the lawsuit filed in federal court in Denver said.

The suit said the state of Colorado is violating inmates' constitutional rights with its current policy of not funding abortions unless a prisoner's life is in danger.

The inmates are represented by an

abortion rights group, the Centre for Reproductive Law & Policy in New York City, and by the American Civil Liberties Union of Colorado.

ACLU legal director Mark Silverstein told Reuters that the government has a heightened responsibility to provide medical services to women in prison because they cannot

earn money to pay for their own health care.

Colorado Department of Corrections spokeswoman Liz McDonough said she was unaware of the lawsuit. She also said she could not comment until it had been reviewed by state attorneys.

The inmate who wants a prompt

abortion faces increased medical risks "every day the procedure is delayed" because of her advanced stage of pregnancy, the lawsuit said.

Silverstein said he did not know the circumstances of the pregnancy. "We had to rush into court" after receiving a letter Friday from the inmate, he said.

Newly diagnosed MS program

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Oregon Chapter, will be offering an educational program to promote understanding and knowledge of MS for people who have been diagnosed with MS in the past two years.

The Newly Diagnosed Series will be held every Wednesday evening during October 2nd to November 6th, 1996 from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. in Portland.

For a registration form, contact the Oregon Chapter at 1 (800) 344-4867. The deadline for registering is September 25th, 1996.

Health care professionals such as physicians, nurses, social workers, occupational and physical therapists will be covering topics including fitness, emotional health, family, employment, medical and health/wellness.

Most people with MS are diagnosed with MS between the ages of 20 to 40, but the unpredictable physical and emotional effects can occur for the rest of their lives.

Governor assigns urgent tasks

Governor John Kitzhaber, meeting last week in Salem with the nine newly appointed members of a streamlined Oregon Health Council, asked for their assistance in three areas:

* Advising him on health care related components of the Governor's budget, which will be submitted to the 1997 Legislature. Council members were asked to review policy issues and opportunities that could occur if new resources become available in the 1997-99 budget.

* Recommending a set of broad priorities for investing available resources in strengthening and expanding the Oregon Health Plan to more lower-income Oregonians who don't have health care now.

* Recommending strategies for building community partnerships to strengthen locally-based program planning and service delivery.

"This Oregon Health Council serves by legislative mandate as the primary health policy advisory body to me, the Legislature and the Health Plan Administrator," said Kitzhaber. "I know I'm asking a lot of you this fall. There is a lot to do, and not much time -- I really appreciate your help."

Alan Yordy, the Chief Executive Officer of Mid-Valley HealthCare who chairs the Council, will appoint the first of several subcommittees next week. Each will focus on a single, critical issue. The first, on stabilizing and expanding access to the Oregon Health Plan, will include representation from providers, hospitals, consumers, and employers. It will report its findings back to the Council within six weeks. A second subcommittee on community partnerships will be formed in late September.

War against osteoporosis

Adding calcium and vitamin D to the diet could help prevent osteoporosis and colorectal cancer, leading causes of disability and death in postmenopausal women, a new study hopes to determine.

The Women's Health Initiative (WHI), a long-term nationwide study of American women, who will recruit more than 45,000 postmenopausal women who will receive either a combined calcium and vitamin D pill or a placebo.

"There have been no studies focusing on the long-term effects of calcium supplementation in postmenopausal women," said Mary Pat Bolton, lead nutritionist for the WHI Clinical Center at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

"The WHI may provide definitive answers on ways to prevent bone loss and hip fractures later in life," he added.

WHI researchers hope the study findings will ultimately decrease the risk for osteoporosis, a disease that depletes bone mass resulting in bone weakness and brittleness.

Women most at risk are slim, small-boned, and fair-complexioned, with a family history of the disease.

Up to half of all menopausal women will be affected by the disease, according to Bolton, who believes a lack of calcium early on is partly to blame.

"Calcium intake is crucial during childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood to help women build the densest bones possible to carry them through life," she said.

Among the many benefits of modern medicine is a wide range of contraceptive choices.

There are a number of methods for couples whether they want to postpone childbearing, don't want more children, or are trying to prevent STD's (sexually transmitted diseases).

Five free booklets from the Consumer Information Center give descriptions of the 12 forms of contra-

Comparing the options

ception for both men and women from the pill to natural family planning.

For each method, they also describe to have children some day, birth control pills are the most popular and most effective form of contraception. Other choices are condoms, the diaphragm, natural family planning or the rhythm method, spermicide foams and the sponges, the implant (Norplant), the injection

(Depo-Provera) and the IUD.

The levels of effectiveness of these methods range from a high of 99 percent to a low of 53 percent, depending on the method used and how careful and responsible the couple is.

For many people, the prevention of STD's including HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is the main factor in choosing a contraceptive. Only one form of birth control currently available--the latex condom for men-

New survey claims to be positive

The results of a client satisfaction survey of the health plans participating in the Oregon Health Plan were released jointly today in Salem by the Office of Medical Assistance Programs (OMAP) and the Health Plan Administrator's Office.

Designed to measure particular indicators of client satisfaction, the mail-return survey of 19,098 adult Medicaid members is part of an ongoing effort to track data on the

state's pioneering health care program.

The results indicate that not only is access better than it was in 1994 before the Oregon Health Plan's implementation, overall satisfaction with health care is better.

Hersh Crawford, OMAP director, praised the participating plans for their willingness to be held accountable for quality and noted that the Oregon Consumer Scorecard Con-

sortium, made up of representatives of government, most of the health plans participating in the Oregon Health Plan, academics and consumers, provided ongoing technical assistance to the project.

"The survey has given us a tool that we and our partners can use to continuously monitor and improve the Oregon Health Plan," Crawford said.

"We will be working with each of

the plans on follow-up action," Crawford added.

Vickie Gates, the Oregon Health Plan administrator, also praised the participating health plans for dramatically increasing access to primary care and promoting quality, cost effective care."

Despite such positive results, opposers and victims of unjust circumstances say there are still many areas the health plans can work on.

U.S. says more women getting tested

The proportion of women aged 18 to 44 who have been tested for the AIDS virus rose by 60 percent between 1991 and 1993, federal health officials said on Thursday.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said that in a 1993 telephone survey of 6,267 women aged 18 to 44, 31.8 percent said they had been tested at least once for HIV.

In a 1991 survey of 13,411 women of the same age group, 18.8 percent said they had been tested.

"Information about HIV testing has gotten out there," said Jacqueline Wilson, a statistician with the CDC's Na-

tional Centre for Health Statistics.

In the 1993 survey, 46.1 percent of blacks, 39.7 percent of Hispanics and 27.9 percent of white women said they had been tested for the HIV virus which causes AIDS.

Women who had not graduated from high school or who lived in poverty were more likely to have been tested, the survey found. The CDC said this was probably due to the availability of HIV testing at public health clinics.

About 7,000 infants are born to HIV-infected women in the United States every year.

The CDC said treatment of the

mother with the drug AZT (zidovudine) may reduce the chances of a baby becoming infected with HIV.

Without treatment, HIV-infected women have a 15 to 30 percent chance of infecting their baby during pregnancy or delivery. Medical treatment can reduce this to about a 1 in 12 chance, the CDC said.

Women accounted for 19 percent of the 73,380 AIDS cases reported in 1995.

The CDC said AIDS was the leading cause of death among black women aged 25 to 44 and the third leading cause of death among all women in that age bracket.

Photocopiers cause lung disease

Photocopier dust can cause serious lung disease, Austrian doctors said Friday.

Christine Armbruster and colleagues at the University of Vienna described the case of a man who evi-

dently developed two conditions from the tiny metal particles in photocopier toner.

In a letter to the Lancet medical journal, they said a 39-year-old man who did not smoke had suffered a

persistent dry cough for a year. He was diagnosed with granulomatous pneumonitis, caused by breathing in tiny particles of metal, and lymphadenopathy. Lymphadenopathy is a swelling of the lymph glands.

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