



HEALTH



Sharing Expertise With the World

Dr. John Handy of Portland (left) performs a robotic surgery at Providence St. Vincent Medical Center as three visiting physicians from Mongolia observe the operation. Dr. Handy was instrumental in bringing the trio to Portland to observe American medical practices following his own trip to Mongolia last May.

Hospitals Share Decisions for Stroke

New registry aimed at improving stroke treatment

(AP) — In a new effort to improve care for stroke victims, Oregon hospitals will soon begin sharing detailed medical records for stroke treatment.

The project reflects the increasingly collaborative efforts among hospitals to improve performance and reduce wide variations in medical practice.

Sixteen Oregon hospitals were recently awarded a \$700,000 federal grant to help pay for the stroke registry, one of eight such grants awarded by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Stroke is a high priority for the health care industry because of its enormous toll. It is the third-highest cause of death in the United States and a leading cause of permanent disability.

Stroke hospitalizations and

related care cost an estimated \$17 billion annually. Indirect costs, such as lost productivity, total \$13 billion annually.

About 750,000 people annually suffer a stroke, and 160,000 die of stroke or later complications, according to the American Heart Association.

And the most recent federal study ranks Oregon's death rate as the third-highest in the nation - worse than several of the so-called "stroke belt" states stretching from Arkansas to Georgia. The reasons are unknown.

Dr. Ted Lowenkopf, one of the organizers of the Oregon registry, says the data could reveal whether gaps in the health care system are partly to blame for the state's high death rate.

Strokes are often a conse-

quence of untreated high blood pressure, diabetes or heart disease. "Are we not managing those properly?" asks Lowenkopf, a neurologist and medical director of the Providence Stroke Center at St. Vincent.

Delays in seeking and obtaining treatment are another likely problem.

Because of those delays, the vast majority of stroke patients nationwide miss the chance for potentially lifesaving treatment with the clot-dissolving drug and other emerging therapies.

Hospitals in the registry will be able to rate their care against others and sort the data to reveal practices that might account for above- or below-average performance.

Plain Talk on Medicare Offered

The Oregon Medicare Education Coalition is sponsoring "Plain Talk about Medicare" meetings to give beneficiaries, their caregivers, and advocates the opportunity to get information from experts who represent agencies and organizations officially involved with the Medicare pro-

gram in Oregon. The meetings are free and no reservations are necessary.

The next sessions are scheduled Tuesday, Aug. 6 from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at the Gateway Elks Lodge, 711 N.E. 100th Ave. and Wednesday, Aug. 21 from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at Legacy

Good Samaritan Hospital and Medical Center in the NSC Building Auditorium, 1040 N.W. 22nd Ave.

No commercial products or sales are involved. Visit the OMPRO Website at www.ompro.org for more information.

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Asthma Made Worse by Air Pollution

Local minority children suffer because of environment

Two organizations in the Portland area have taken action to raise awareness about asthma, a medical condition suffered by many African-American and Hispanic children and made worse by air pollution.

Since we spend about 90 percent of our time indoors, and due to the tight sealing and insulating for energy savings, the concentration of pollutants we are exposed to daily may be even greater indoors than outdoors.

Moreover, in communities in north and northeast Portland, where pollution levels are higher than other parts of the city, you essentially have no clean air to breathe!

Asthma is an inflammatory lung disease that causes constriction of the airways, making it difficult to breathe.

We don't know what causes asthma or how to cure it, but we do know that certain triggers can increase symptoms in people with asthma. These triggers include second-hand smoke and common allergens such as dust, mold, pollen and pet dander.

Over the past decade, studies have increasingly shown a significant relationship between minority communities and high levels of air pollution.

Additionally, these findings coincide with the results of similar research showing a higher incidence of asthma in minorities, particularly in African-Americans and Latinos. According to the American Lung Association's 'Minorities and Air Pollution' Fact Sheet, 63 percent of African-American

children and 69 percent of Hispanic children live in areas that do not meet the current national ozone standards.

According to the Department of Human Services' Oregon Asthma Program, in 1999, the rates of asthma in adults with an income of less than \$25,000 was more than double the rates for adults with greater incomes.

Recent studies also find evidence that correlates asthma with people of color living in urban settings.

In light of these findings, two organizations in the Portland area have taken action to raise awareness about these startling statistics.

One group is the Environmental Justice Action Group, which is a community-based, membership-driven organization founded by a group of north and northeast Portland residents in 1996 to address the environmental and public health hazards faced by local residents.

The other group is the American Lung Association of Oregon and its Master Home Environmentalist program. The program uses trained volunteers to help people reduce indoor air pollution. The help is free and is especially geared to low-income families who are looking for low-cost or even free solutions to the indoor air quality problems.

The MHE program is currently interested in recruiting volunteers from the North and Northeast Portland neighborhoods, especially people of color.

For more information, call 503-924-4094 ext.18, 1-800-LUNG-USA or 503-283-7841.

If you think your home may contain pollutants and you want an assessment, contact either organization.

"Smoking doesn't work in Oregon."

I remember walking out of our conference room and my eyes were literally stinging. My boss smoked, so everybody felt they had a right to light up whenever they felt like it. That was before the Oregon Smokefree Workplace Law.

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If you've got questions, please contact us:

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