

HEALTH MATTERS

Advocate Comes Out of Retirement

To address addictions, mental health

The long-time executive for a non-profit agency that houses and serves homeless adults and families beset by poverty, addictions and mental illness will tackle some of the same issues for the Oregon Department of Human Services.

Richard L. Harris, who recently retired from Portland's Central City Concern, has joined the state agency as the new interim assistant director for addictions and

mental health.

With the department facing budget belt-tightening and an upcoming legislative session, Harris says there are many challenges, including preparing a workable budget for the Addictions and Mental Health Division that focuses on delivering the required services in the best possible way.

"I'll be working with staff, providers and stakeholders to make sure every dollar is spent wisely and building consensus within DHS and all the other divisions



Richard L. Harris

to make the most of our resources," he says.

Harris says one way to streamline the delivery system of healthcare and control the enormous cost of caring for the uninsured is to enroll everybody in universal health care. And he called for continued emphasis on community-based services.

He said addressing the impact of drug and alcohol addiction on our society is also important.

"Alcohol and drugs are big cost drivers in human service

and public safety systems, so to get a handle on these costs we need to do a better job of addressing addictions," he said. "Determining when to apply services at the right place and right time is important. People are more likely to change behaviors and recover when they have stable housing. When they do, that makes our job less difficult."

Harris says he plans to work closely with staff, providers and stakeholders during his tenure at DHS, most likely through the next legislative session and during the national recruitment to find his successor.

Get Ready for Flu Season

Flu season is beginning and health officials encourage the public to get vaccinated early. Vaccine is arriving at numerous locations, including grocery stores and health care providers. This year's vaccine is in plentiful supply and is formulated to protect against three new strains of the virus.

According to the Oregon Department of Human Services Public Health Division, nearly 450 Oregonians die of influenza every year. Influenza and related pneumonia is the number one cause of death from infections in Oregon. Nationally, more than 220,000 people are hospitalized with flu complications and flu kills more than 36,000 people annually.

"It is especially important to get vaccinated if you are at greater risk of developing serious flu-related complications, such as pneumonia," says Paul Lewis, M.D., Deputy Tri-County Health Officer. Groups at higher risk include children aged 6 months to 5 years, pregnant women, people 50 years of age and older, people with chronic medical conditions, and anyone living in a nursing home or long-term care facility.

This year, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that all children from 6 months to 18 years receive flu shots. Children are twice as likely to get influenza as adults. Caregivers, fam-

ily members, and those who work with higher risk groups are also encouraged to be immunized.

Influenza vaccine provided to a pregnant woman may benefit both mothers and their young infants, according to a recent study by researchers of Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, published in the New England Journal of Medicine. Researchers found that babies born to vaccinated mothers had a 63 percent lower risk of laboratory-confirmed influenza compared to babies whose mother had not received a flu shot.

Pneumonia (pneumococcal disease) is a leading complication associated with seasonal flu. Some types of pneumonia can be prevented by vaccines. Talk with your doctor about which pneumonia vaccine especially if you are older than 65 or have lung disease, heart trouble or other chronic medical conditions.

Health officials remind the public to practice "good health manners" to prevent transmission of disease. "We encourage everyone to cover your cough and wash hands often. If you are sick, please stay home, and if your children are sick please keep them out of school or child care," says Lewis.

For more information on flu shot locations, call 1-800-SAFENET, or visit www.getaflushot.com or www.flucliniclocator.org

HEALTHWATCH

Senior Aerobics -- A low-impact workout geared specifically toward seniors. Call 503-449-0783 for current schedule.

Better Breathers -- An asthma educational support group meets on the 1st Tuesday of the month from 1:15 p.m. to 2:45 p.m. at Adventist Medical Center. For more information, call 503-251-6830.

Peer-to-Peer Recovery -- Peer-to-peer education recovery is a free 9-week course for mental health patients. Mentors who are recovering from mental illness are trained to teach coping strategies to others. For more information, call 503-228-5692.

Cardiac-Rehab Exercise Classes -- A medically supervised exercise program for people dealing with heart conditions. For more information, call 503-251-6260.

Osteoporosis Screening -- An ultrasound bone density screening with personalized education; fee \$30. To schedule an appointment, call 503-261-6611.

Stroke Alert Screening -- Check your carotid arteries with a painless ultrasound to assess your risk. Fee \$40. To schedule a screening, call 503-251-6137.

Chronic Pain Support Group -- meets the first Wednesday at 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. and the third Wednesday of each month, from 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. For more information, call 503-256-4000.

Leg Alert Screening -- Check for peripheral arterial disease with this safe, simple screening using ankle and arm blood pressure. The fee is \$40. To schedule an appointment, call 503-251-6137.

Bereavement Support Groups -- Free, safe confidential group meetings for those who have experienced the death of a loved one offered on various nights and locations. For information and registration, call 503-215-4622.

Hospice Volunteer Training -- Providence offers a free comprehensive course of training to prepare people who are interested in becoming hospice volunteers. No previous experience is required. For more information or to request an application packet, call Melinda Smith, hospice volunteer coordinator, at 503-215-5774.

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