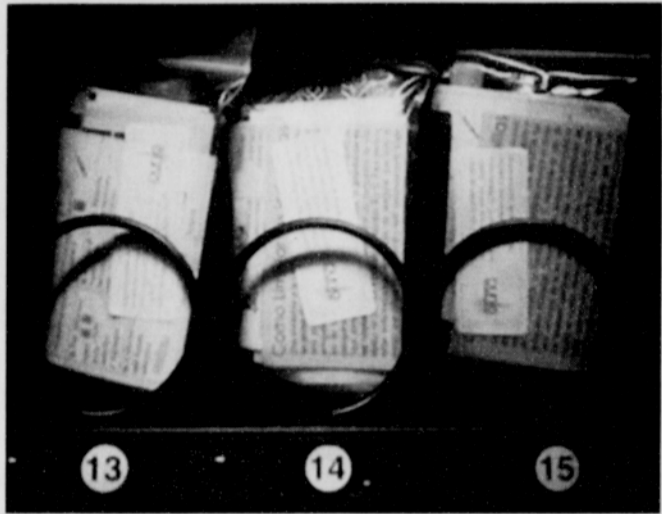


HEALTH MATTERS



Packets containing condoms, syringes, cookers, cotton filters, gauze and sterile water necessary to prepare drugs for injection sit in a vending machine located in a poor neighborhood in San Juan, Puerto Rico. (AP Photo)

Vending Syringes for Addicts Tested

(AP) -- A needle exchange program in Puerto Rico is testing a vending machine that provides drug users with clean syringes after-hours to fight the spread of HIV and hepatitis C.

Dr. Jose Vargas Vidot is the founder of Community Initiative, the U.S. island territory's only needle-exchange group. He says a single machine will

make clean syringes available at night outside the group's office in Hato Rey.

The vending machine program targets young addicts reluctant to seek help.

Drug users can get syringes, cookers, cotton filters, gauze and sterile water to prepare drugs for injection by inserting a special card.

Protest Brings 11 Arrests

Eleven people, including one nurse, were arrested Thursday at the Regence BlueCross/BlueShield headquarters in Portland during a protest to demand changes to Regence's insurance practices and political activities, and in favor of single payer health care reform.

The civil disobedience was organized by the Portland Mobilization for Health Care for All.

"We believe that private insurance companies which put profit ahead of care are the prob-

lem," said protester Peter Shapiro with the Portland Jobs with Justice Health Care Committee. "We are demanding that Regence immediately authorize any doctor-ordered treatment for life threatening conditions and that Regence stop spending ratepayer money on lobbying efforts."

The activists said they attempted to meet with Regence Chief Executive Officer Mark Ganz, but were turned away and the building was locked down.

Inspired by his own Struggle

Health advocate launches patient support group

Jason McNichol first discovered just how challenging navigating the health-care system can be when he took a bad tumble off his bicycle in 1996.

Then a doctoral student, McNichol was rushed to a local emergency room at a well-regarded hospital. But what began as a seemingly straightforward case of two broken bones soon turned into a saga of medical errors, insurance snafus, and a rare complication that left his doctors helpless. A year later, he still could not walk and was in tremendous pain.

"I learned the hard way that I had to become my own advocate to get the best care I could," he recalls.

Over the next two years, McNichol researched his condition extensively, considered alternatives, and battled bureaucracies to see specialists. With the support of friends and family, he found another surgical option and worked with his new doctors to wean himself off crutches.

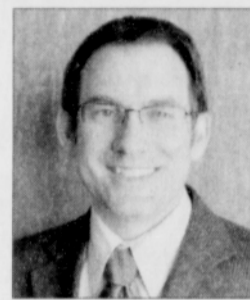
He is now able to walk again—unaided and without pain.

The journey left him determined to help others. "I was lucky—I was a motivated healthcare geek with plenty of

free time and friends inside the system to help me fight. Most patients and families don't have these advantages," he says. In fact, academic studies have found that the degree to which patients and families are empowered to advocate for themselves can make a big difference in outcomes.

Inspired by this and other experiences, McNichol recently founded Health Advocacy Solutions in Portland.

The independent organization is dedicated to helping patients, families, and communities navigate the medical system to get the best care possible. Volunteers and expert ad-



Jason McNichol

visers offer independent education, research, and support to help clients solve insurance problems, find and work effectively with providers, and make informed health-

care choices. "After completing my PhD, I had been working as a program director on medical education policy for a large nonprofit in New York. The work was rewarding, but I wanted to apply what I was learning to help families and communities on-the-ground," McNichol says. "I knew Portland was at the leading edge of health-care innovation, so I took a leap of faith and moved here to start HAS." The advocacy group began

by offering one-on-one support to patients and families grappling with complicated medical conditions and insurance problems.

Last summer, the organization was granted 501(c)(3) status from the IRS as a charitable nonprofit. The group's support services are expanding to include workshops and online help. The first workshop, on how to navigate the Medicare maze, will be held on Nov. 7 at Portland State University, where McNichol also teaches as an adjunct professor in the sociology department.

"Making informed choices regarding Medicare plans can be especially hard. Medicare is a crazy soup of different options, and most offers for help are underwritten by commercial interests with plans to sell," McNichol says. "Many enrollees don't know that the choices they make now will shape their quality of care, costs, and eligibility options for years to come."

"My colleagues and I are thrilled to be doing this work," McNichol adds. "Right now, few organizations exist to help people effectively champion their own best interests in

our rapidly changing health-care system. Trustworthy information and support is hard to find, and the burden of being your own advocate can be too much to bear when it comes to your own health or that of a loved one."

Get Help Navigating Medicare

The local nonprofit group Health Advocacy Solutions is offering an independent Medicare navigation workshop from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Saturday, Nov. 7 at Portland State University, Room 269 of Cramer Hall.

Making sound choices about Medicare can be difficult with plan sponsors beckoning to help around every corner. At this hands-on work-

shop, professional advocates will offer independent guidance, answer your questions, and provide you with tools you can use to make informed choices.

Registration for the program is \$35 with scholarships available for low-income participants. Pre-registration is required by visiting HASolutions.org/upcoming or calling 503-828-1078.

Stimulus Brings Jobs to OHSU

Oregon Health and Science University has attracted \$51.5 million in federal stimulus funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

"So far, ARRA funds have created 116 full-time and part-

time jobs at OHSU, with more hires expected in the future," said Dr. Joe Robertson, president of the local medical center and largest Portland employer.

The hiring includes study coordinators, research assistants,

lab technicians and scientists.

In a lab run by OHSU researcher Jennifer Loftis, \$944,000 in stimulus funds over the next two years will support new research and result in the addition of a study coordina-

tor, research assistant and medical lab technician. Together, the research team will work to test new methods to treat methamphetamine addiction.

The stimulus monies also support local businesses that provide goods and services to the university.

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Above: Gavin Gregory and cast in Ragtime. Below: Susannah Mars, cast; and Todd A. Horman and Gavin Gregory in Ragtime. Photography by Owen Carey



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