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PHOTO BY ZACHARY SENN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

O'Nesha Cochran prepares for her shift as a peer-recovery counselor to those suffering from opioid addiction at the Oregon Health and Science University's Marquam Hill campus in southwest Portland.

On the Front Lines

Peer-recovery counselors battle opioid epidemic

BY ZACHARY SENN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

A unique, collaborative approach to addiction care at Oregon Health and Science University is helping to tackle the opioid epidemic.

As the struggle against heroine and the abuse of prescription opiates continues to escalate across America,

Northwestern states such as Oregon, Washington and Alaska have been hit especially hard by drug overdose deaths and related hospitalizations.

Dr. Honora Englander, who serves as an associate professor of medicine at OHSU, first began to notice the influx of hospitalizations caused by complications from opioid addiction while working in the school's hospital. More patients, for example, were being hospitalized after experiencing an overdose, being diagnosed with Substance Abuse Disorder, or from contracting a blood or bone infection from using impure substances or improperly sterilized

equipment

"As a health system and hospital, we were very well positioned to manage people's medical needs and surgical needs," Englander told the Portland Observer, "But really did not have any systems to support their addiction needs."

By assessing the unique needs presented by the opioid epidemic in the Portland area, Englander and her colleagues developed the framework for what is now the Improving Addiction Care Team, or Project IMPACT. The

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