

In rural Oregon, trouble getting medication

By MARKIAN HAWRYLUK
Bend Bulletin

BEND — Murray's Drug is a throwback to a simpler time. Opened in 1959 long before national drugstore chains and mail-order pharmacies dominated the prescription world, the family-owned business is still the only place in town the 1,200 residents of Heppner can fill a prescription. In fact, between their Heppner and Condon stores, pharmacists John and Ann Murray, and their daughter, Laurie Murray-Wood, run the only brick-and-mortar pharmacies in all of Morrow, Gilliam, Sherman and Wheeler counties.

"It's hard to keep these pharmacies open six or seven days a week," he said. "When we were raising our kids and Ann and I were the only pharmacists, we had two stores to cover, so five days kind of became the norm."

As a result, Heppner is one of many towns across Oregon with limited access to prescription drugs. A recent analysis from Oregon State University suggests that the lack of pharmacy services may be boosting the rates of hospital readmissions among seniors, at great cost to both patients and the health care system.

The study tallied the cumulative number of hours pharmacies were open in each primary care service area across Oregon, then compared those to readmission rates at local hospitals. In urban areas, with plentiful access to pharmacies, hospital readmission rates among patients over the age of 65 were lower, at about 14.7 percent of discharges. In rural areas, where pharmacies were open fewer hours per day, hospital readmission rates were a half percentage point higher at 15.3 percent.

"That's pretty significant considering the number of patients that are admitted to hospitals in Oregon each year and when you translate that to the amount of money that's being saved in reducing readmissions," said Sarah Bissonnette, an OSU post-doctoral fellow and lead author of the study.

Rural hospitals do what they can to help patients but are often limited in how much medication they can provide at discharge. Pioneer Memorial Hospital in Heppner has a drug room that supplies medications for inpatient or emergency room patients, said Pioneer CEO Bob Houser. "They can get most of their pharmacy fills here if they are sent home on a weekend when Murray's Drug is closed," he said.

"The drug room in the hospital is not a retail pharmacy, but we are allowed to send home up to a three-day supply of drugs with the patient to use until the pharmacy is open."

But if patients need medications not stocked by the hospital, they may need to drive an hour to Hermiston to

get the prescription filled. The Murrys have taken multiple steps to limit the impact on their community residents. They publish an emergency number that local residents can call if they cannot wait until morning or through the weekend to fill a script.

"I fear that it does affect admissions," he said. "We try to provide services and get it to them when they need it. But say that person is timid, or feels it's an imposition, even though it's endangering their health. The wait to get medicine or going without medicine is always a bad thing."

Patients treated for pneumonia might be started on antibiotics and then sent home with a prescription for more. But if they can't get to a pharmacy to fill that prescription for a day or two, that infection could return. Or heart failure patients who can't fill a prescription for a diuretic could see fluid build up in their lungs and have difficulty breathing.

The researchers found that some rural areas had only a single pharmacy, open 54 hours per week. "There's only two 24-hour pharmacies in the state of Oregon, and both are in the Portland area," said David Lee, an OSU assistant professor of pharmacy and senior author of the study. "So if you need medication at kind of an odd hour, the only place you can do it is Portland."

Because pharmacy access was lower in rural areas, the analysis could not tease out the different impact of pharmacy hours versus other limitations of rural areas — such as the lack of doctors or support services — that could also play a role in higher readmission rates.

"There's been research showing that rural communities have less access to physicians and other health care entities," Bissonnette said. "We think it's important to consider pharmacies as well."

But hospitals now have a vested interest in ensuring patients can get their medications after discharge. Since 2010, Medicare has levied increasing financial penalties on hospitals if too many patients need to be readmitted within 30 days. Some hospitals across the country are now opening dispensaries to ensure their patients aren't going without.

Bissonnette said while some states have regulations that prevent hospitals from sending patients home with more than a day's supply of medications, it's

largely a resource issue.

"Hospital pharmacies aren't set up to do the outpatient billing of insurance, so that's a huge barrier," she said. "It might mean an extra pharmacist when you only have one, so that's a significant amount of staff increase and money."

Michael Powell, pharmacy director at St. Charles Bend said he believed that lack of pharmacy access did contribute to readmission rates, although the hospital had not yet quantified the impact. The hospital is running a pilot program on one nursing unit, having pharmacists deliver prescriptions and counsel patients at their bedside prior to discharge. That also helps to identify when patients are unable to afford their medications so they can be referred

to the hospital's assistance programs. "I do believe that we will have significant positive impact on readmission rates through these programs," Powell said. "But we do not have data to show this yet."

The OSU researchers also found that pharmacies and hospitals tended to be located close together. So patients who lived farther from a hospital had more difficulty filling their prescriptions.

Some Murray's Drug customers must travel three hours round trip to pick up their medications. If someone forgets or has trouble making the trip, the Murrys are often there to close the gap. Two months ago, a patient in Fossil had run out of medications, so the Murrys sent an employee from their Condon store on a two-hour delivery trip.

"That's the kind of stuff we do in rural areas," he said. "It doesn't pay not to help people."

Lee said mail-order services could help improve medication access for patients in rural areas, but recommended that hospitals follow up with a phone call to ensure that patients know how to take their medication and what their potential side effects could be.

The Murrys, however, counter that mail-order pharmacies are hurting access. As more insurance companies require patients to use mail-order pharmacies, they're putting independent drug stores out of business. And that might leave a discharged patient nowhere to fill prescriptions on a same-day basis. The Murrys and other independent pharmacists in Oregon are pushing for legislation that would prevent pharmacy benefit managers from excluding community pharmacies.

"It's hard to keep these pharmacies open six or seven days a week."

— John Murray,
Runs only pharmacies in Morrow, Gilliam, Sherman and Wheeler counties

BRIEFLY

Volunteer accused of killing dog during food delivery

GRESHAM (AP) — Police in Gresham, Oregon, arrested a Meals on Wheels volunteer accused of killing a Chihuahua that belonged to a disabled woman for whom he delivered food.

The department said Thursday the incident happened Aug. 8. June Rigsby told police she was in bed when the volunteer arrived with a meal, a task he had been doing every Monday for months.

Rigsby says her three dogs jumped off the bed to greet him. She later heard a thud and only two dogs returned. After the volunteer left, Rigsby found the Chihuahua named "Baby" dead on the kitchen floor.

Police say the volunteer, 68-year-old Donald Nicoli, remembered kicking the dog, but couldn't recall much else about what happened. He's been charged with aggravated animal abuse.

An examination at Oregon State University found the dog died from blunt force trauma and skull fractures.

Coast Guard helps sailors in high seas off Coast

SEATTLE (AP) — U.S. and Canadian Coast Guard crews were working to make sure five people on a sailboat that was taking in water off the Washington Coast made it safely to Tillamook.

Coast Guard officials say they received a report Wednesday that a 43-foot sailing vessel was taking on water 218 miles west of La Push in 20-foot seas and 30-mph winds.

An electrical pump onboard couldn't handle the flooding and people were using buckets to bail water.

Two Coast Guard aircrews flew from

Warrenton with the pump while another aircrew from Sacramento, California provided cover. Upon arrival, the sailors declined to be hoisted off the boat but the new pump worked to control the flooding.

An aircrew from Prince Rupert, British Columbia is providing aerial surveillance over the vessel and Coast Guard personnel are maintaining communication with the sailboat crew as they travel.

Purchase offers complicate Portland shelter

PORTLAND (AP) — Seven companies have offered millions of dollars to buy a Portland property that had been slated to become a large homeless shelter.

The development companies offered between \$6 million and \$10 million for the warehouse, possibly complicating the City Council's plans to convert it into a shelter for up to 400 people, reported *The Oregonian*/Oregon Live.

Portland's sewer bureau had been taking offers for the 14-acre property. But last week, the City Council voted that the bureau should lease the space to the housing division for at least \$10,000 a month.

The purchase offers, revealed Wednesday in response to a public records request, complicate an ongoing disagreement about the value of the property.

City officials don't know how much the shelter will cost or who will pay for it, but developer Homer Williams has promised to come up with private money to operate a mass homeless shelter. He didn't submit an offer to buy the waterfront property.

According to Multnomah County property records, the sewer bureau bought the property for about \$6.33 million in 2004 and it has a current market value of \$8.6 million.

Corrections

The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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AccuWeather.com Forecast

TODAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
Sunny and very warm	Hot with plenty of sunshine	Sunshine and very hot	Sunny and cooler but pleasant	Delightful with plenty of sun
89° 55°	95° 62°	97° 59°	82° 50°	82° 52°
94° 47°	98° 58°	99° 61°	86° 51°	86° 48°

ALMANAC

PENDLETON
through 3 p.m. yesterday
TEMPERATURE HIGH LOW
Yesterday 95° 60°
Normals 87° 57°
Records 106° (1897) 43° (1904)
PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.00"
Month to date 0.07"
Normal month to date 0.24"
Year to date 7.39"
Last year to date 5.00"
Normal year to date 8.23"

HERMISTON
through 3 p.m. yesterday
TEMPERATURE HIGH LOW
Yesterday 97° 58°
Normals 87° 57°
Records 105° (1967) 44° (1987)
PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.00"
Month to date 0.05"
Normal month to date 0.12"
Year to date 4.99"
Last year to date 3.25"
Normal year to date 6.07"

SUN AND MOON

Last	New	First	Full
Aug 24	Sep 1	Sep 9	Sep 16

REGIONAL FORECAST

Coastal Oregon: Mostly sunny today. Warmer, patchy fog in the south in the morning. Clear tonight.

Eastern and Central Oregon: Plenty of sunshine today; very warm across the north. Clear tonight.

Western Washington: Blazing sunshine today. Clear tonight. Plenty of sunshine tomorrow.

Eastern Washington: Plenty of sunshine today. Clear tonight. Plenty of sunshine tomorrow.

Cascades: Plenty of sunshine today; very warm. Clear tonight. Plenty of sunshine tomorrow.

Northern California: Clouds, then sun at the coast today; hot in central parts. Sunny elsewhere.

REGIONAL CITIES

	Today			Sat.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Astoria	88	59	s	75	57	s
Baker City	86	41	s	89	41	s
Bend	86	49	s	92	57	s
Brookings	70	54	s	68	51	pc
Burns	92	45	s	93	48	s
Enterprise	84	49	s	88	52	s
Eugene	105	55	s	101	52	s
Heppner	86	50	s	93	53	s
Hermiston	94	47	s	98	58	s
John Day	90	56	s	96	60	s
Klamath Falls	95	51	s	95	49	s
La Grande	87	46	s	92	49	s
Meacham	84	43	s	89	45	s
Medford	111	67	s	108	66	s
Newport	79	52	s	63	50	s
North Bend	75	53	s	66	53	pc
Ontario	95	59	s	93	55	s
Pasco	93	50	s	95	54	s
Pendleton	89	55	s	95	62	s
Portland	100	66	s	100	62	s
Redmond	90	45	s	95	50	s
Salem	103	61	s	101	56	s
Spokane	84	57	s	90	61	s
Ukiah	82	43	s	90	61	s
Vancouver	98	66	s	98	60	s
Walla Walla	91	60	s	95	65	s
Yakima	93	54	s	98	58	s

WORLD CITIES

	Today			Sat.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Beijing	89	71	c	91	72	s
Hong Kong	87	79	t	89	80	t
Jerusalem	86	70	s	88	70	s
London	69	58	r	70	59	pc
Mexico City	74	58	t	73	57	t
Moscow	79	63	pc	74	59	sh
Paris	76	59	sh	76	57	pc
Rome	83	67	pc	84	68	s
Seoul	92	77	c	93	77	c
Sydney	73	51	s	65	47	s
Tokyo	88	79	t	86	80	t

WINDS

(in mph)	Today	Saturday
Boardman	NNE 7-14	NE 3-6
Pendleton	NNW 6-12	NNW 4-8

UV INDEX TODAY

1 4 6 6 4 1

8 a.m. 10 a.m. Noon 2 p.m. 4 p.m. 6 p.m.
0-2, Low 3-5, Moderate 6-7, High; 8-10, Very High; 11+, Extreme

The higher the AccuWeather.com UV Index™ number, the greater the need for eye and skin protection.

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NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.

National Summary: Storms will dot much of the Southeastern states today. Severe storms will extend from Oklahoma and Colorado to Wisconsin. As cool air invades the northern Plains, heat will hold on in the Northwest.

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 109° in Needles, Calif. Low 32° in Angel Fire, N.M.

NATIONAL CITIES

	Today			Sat.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Albuquerque	87	63	t	83	61	t
Atlanta	88	73	c	88	73	t
Atlanta City	85	72	s	84	73	pc
Baltimore	89	69	s	90	71	pc
Billings	66	47	r	77	52	pc
Birmingham	85	74	t	88	74	t
Boise	92	61	s	91	63	s
Boston	82	69	s	82	67	s
Charleston, SC	92	77	c	93	77	t
Charleston, WV	81	67	t	85	71	pc
Chicago	87	70	t	75	60	t
Cleveland	88	71	s	88	70	pc
Dallas	85	73	t	81	71	t
Denver	76	45	t	77	51	pc
Detroit	88	71	t	85	65	c
El Paso	96	72	t	93	68	t
Fairbanks	65	57	s	64	52	c
Fargo	73	55	pc	69	47	pc
Honolulu	87	73	pc	86	75	pc
Houston	89	76	t	91	74	t
Indianapolis	84	71	t	79	63	t
Jacksonville	94	73	pc	96	73	t
Kansas City	87	65	t	75	55	t
Las Vegas	101	82	s	102	81	s
Little Rock	84	74	t	85	72	t
Los Angeles	82	62	pc	82	62	pc
Louisville	85	72	t	83	70	c
Memphis	82	75	t	85	73	t
Miami	91	75	pc	91	76	pc
Millwaukee	89	70	t	80	61	t
Minneapolis	78	62	sh	70	54	sh
Nashville	81	71	t	84	71	t
New Orleans	92	77	pc	90	77	pc
New York City	88	74	s	87	73	pc
Oklahoma City	86	68	t	80	59	c
Omaha	86	61	t	74	54	c
Philadelphia	91	72	t	91	73	pc
Phoenix	103	81	s	101	81	s
Portland, ME	84	60	s	81	61	s
Providence	86	66	s	83	67	s
Raleigh	90	73	t	89	73	t
Rapid City	60	43	r	69	46	pc
Reno	96	61	s	96	63	s
Sacramento	92	60	s	91	59	s
St. Louis	87	73	t	82	63	t
Salt Lake City	93	63	s	90	65	s
San Diego	78	67	pc	79	68	pc
San Francisco	72	57	pc	73	58	pc
Seattle	97	62	s	93	60	s
Tucson	97	74	s	94	74	s
Washington, DC	92	75	s	93	75	pc
Wichita	90	65	t	77	58	pc

Weather (W): s-sunny, pc-partly cloudy, c-cloudy, sh-showers, t-thunderstorms, r-rain, sf-snow flurries, sn-snow, i-ice.