

HERMISTON

New Good Shepherd records system to provide patient tools

By **JADE MCDOWELL**
East Oregonian

Patients of Good Shepherd Health Care System will have easier access to their health care information as the hospital and its clinics switch to a new medical records system.

The new system, known as Epic, goes live on Nov. 3. While it represents a massive change for employees who are currently training for the switch, it will also represent new tools for patients.

Jim Schlenker, chief operating officer of Good Shepherd, said the new system comes with a “My

Health” patient portal that can be accessed online 24 hours a day. Through that portal, patients will be able to see open time slots for their doctor and schedule their own appointments. They will also be able to access test results and billing information, request prescription refills and message their provider follow-up questions about their visits.

“The portal will definitely add some tools that more and more people are coming to expect,” Schlenker said.

The main advantage of Epic, however, has to do with seamless transfer of

records between medical facilities, both within the Good Shepherd family and with other hospitals. CEO Dennis Burke said that most of the hospitals in the Pacific Northwest, including Kadlec Regional Medical Center in the Tri-Cities, are on the Epic system.

That means if a Hermiston resident gets referred to a specialist in Portland, or has a medical emergency while vacationing on the coast, the provider they are seeing will be able to have full access to their health records.

“It’s a huge deal to be able to see the big picture and not have to rely on,

‘Can you fax this to me?’ and maybe you’ll get it in an hour,” Schlenker said.

He said privacy laws will still apply — someone would have to be a patient at one of those other clinics or hospitals for a provider to look up their information.

Burke said Good Shepherd’s current medical records system has been a good hospital system but does not scale as well to clinics. A steering committee of physicians spent months researching different systems and favored Epic, but Good Shepherd was too small to join Epic on its own. In the end, the hospital was able to transi-

tion to Epic because Legacy Health, which owns Legacy Emanuel Medical Center in Portland and several other hospitals around the state, agreed to let Good Shepherd join its “instance” of Epic.

“We’re deeply appreciate of Legacy for allowing us to partner with them,” Burke said.

He said people have been approaching him saying they heard a rumor that Legacy was acquiring Good Shepherd, but that is not the case. The hospital is merely contracting with Legacy on medical records and will remain independently owned and operated.

Schlenker said the hospital has invested more than \$3.2 million into Epic, but it is expected to be a significant benefit to the hospital and patients. He asked that people be patient with any hiccups that happen as the system goes online.

On Oct. 24 from 5-8 p.m. at the Hermiston Community Center, Good Shepherd is holding what it hopes is its first annual community meeting, where members of the public are invited to get updates and ask questions.

Contact Jade McDowell at jmcdowell@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4536.

Health officials propose fee increase to pay for wider drinking water testing

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Under a proposal from state health officials, most public water systems — from small housing developments to bigger cities serving thousands of residents — may have to pay higher monitoring fees to the state.

Officials are asking for a \$1.8 million bump in fees in the state’s next two-year budget to cover the costs of monitoring public water systems, an area they say has long been underfunded at a risk to public health and public trust in the safety of drinking water.

“Smaller drinking water systems in Oregon are vulnerable,” agency officials wrote in their agency budget request, which was submitted for review by the governor’s office and the legislature, which will hammer out the final budget.

They say that lack of staff and money is “jeopardizing the program’s ability to fully meet its mission.”

The request follows renewed public interest in the safety of Oregon’s drinking water.

This past summer, toxic algae at Detroit Lake prevented vulnerable groups, including people with liver conditions, pregnant women and young children, from safely drinking Salem city water.

The state regulates the roughly 900 public water systems that fall between small, private systems with fewer than 10 customers and larger systems subject to more stringent federal Safe Drinking Water Act standards.

The state wants to improve monitoring of systems ranging from the Aching Acres Mobile Home Park in Oregon City, serving six people, to the Big Woods Water District in Roseburg, serving 20.

Together those small systems serve about 15,500 Oregonians, according to state data.

Those state-regulated systems aren’t inspected, but they do have to test water



National Guard file photo by Sgt. Jennifer Lena, 115th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment. **Andy Smetana, left, with the city of Salem Public Works Department, and Oregon Army National Guard Spc. Joshua White, with A Company, 141st Brigade Support Battalion, 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team, conduct water distribution operations for residents in Salem on June 2, 2018.**

samples regularly. About a one-fifth of those systems aren’t doing that, though, said Jonathan Modie, Oregon Health Authority spokesman.

“The problem with state-regulated systems is that we don’t have staff to adequately enforce the regulations when a system stops submitting required monitoring data,” Modie wrote in an email to the Capital Bureau. “We also lack the staff to provide technical assistance to systems that need help.”

State-regulated systems are required to monitor quarterly for coliform bacteria, nitrate annually, and arsenic at least once.

The state receives more than 180,000 lab analyses from water systems every year, and most of those are entered manually into a state database.

That information is compared to safe standards and if a contamination is detected, an email alert is sent to state or county officials to investigate the contamination.

The state also monitors systems subject to federal Safe Drinking Water Act standards, and inspects those every three or five years; those systems would also face fee increases under the health authority’s proposal.

The agency wants to charge an annual fee based on the number of connections the water system has, regardless of whether it is subject to regular inspections.

and adapt to limited resources, we also need a sustainable base program.”

Bruce Sargent, owner of the Buckhorn Springs Resort in the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument in Southern Oregon, said he doesn’t have an issue with what he says is a monthly cost of about \$35 to test the water in the resort’s system.

In the months that the resort is open and operating, he sends samples to a testing company, which forwards the samples to the state, Sargent said.

Buckhorn’s system, which serves 11 people, is regulated by the state but isn’t inspected, according to state data.

Sargent doesn’t want to pay an additional fee for water monitoring. Under the proposal, systems like his would have to hand over \$75 to the state every year.

“I don’t think they do very much for us, so if there was a fee, it wouldn’t be a good thing from my point of view,” Sargent said.

The state agency said that the money would step up enforcement of the systems that aren’t testing water for health hazards.

The agency has already received some additional money for drinking water issues in the current budget.

Last month, the Legislature’s Emergency Board approved an extra \$160,450 for personnel costs in the Drinking Water Services program.

“Colleagues, the issue of contaminants in drinking water in Salem was huge,” said state Sen. Jackie Winters, R-Salem, during the emergency board meeting. “I’m sure you’ve read a lot about it and this will help the agency in order to work on some of those issues.”



Photo contributed by Morrow County Sheriff’s Office. **Flooding in the Heppner area forced one family out of their home on Tuesday.**

Flooding forces Heppner family out of their home, locals help fill sand bags

HEPPNER — The downpour Tuesday flooded out a Heppner family.

The Morrow County Sheriff’s Office reported Heppner received 1.45 inches of rain in 24 hours, while 2.4 inches drenched the outlying areas. The American Red Cross reported a torrent forced four adults and a child to leave their house on the 54200 Block of Highway 74, Heppner. The Red Cross sent a team of disaster responders to help with their immediate basic needs, such as temporary housing, food and clothing.

Four members of the sheriff’s office responded to help with flooding at Highway 207 and Willow Creek Road, along with state and local road and emergency agencies.

Locals and Heppner schools principal Matt Combe with 10 senior high students waded into the mess. They filled sand bags to help control the flow.

The sheriff’s office on its Facebook page thanked

everyone for their efforts and called particular attention to Combe and the students — Hunter Nichols, Jason Rea, Gibson McCurry, Cason Mitchell, Tyler Carter, Logan Burright, Keegan Gibbs, Leo Waite, Zavier Glover and Kellen Grant.

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