

Hope: Stem cell transplant carries high price tag

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Other treatments show promise but are still considered experimental by insurance companies.

Stem cell transplantation seemed to offer the most hope. Jeff's stem cells would be collected. He would undergo chemotherapy to destroy his malfunctioning immune system and then the collected stem cells would be returned to his body. The process takes several excruciating months and the outcome isn't assured. The added life expectancy could only be a few years, even if all goes well.

"It's not a for sure deal," he said. "It may take or it may not."

The procedure is expensive. Sepulveda will have to provide roughly \$200,000 out of pocket. Friends and family are working to raise the money.

The 37-year-old has a lot to live for — his wife, two young daughters, a close extended family, a good job at Les Schwab Tires and unfinished dreams.

"My priority right now is being here for my wife and kids as long as I can," he said.

Rebecca is focused on Jeff.

"He's pretty quiet and super hard working. He's a great dad to our kids," she said. "This has all been a big shock to us."

About 300,000 Americans have scleroderma, according to the Scleroderma Foundation. The disease, which is difficult to diagnose because it shares symptoms with other autoimmune diseases, typically comes on between the ages of 25 to 35.

Outwardly, Jeff looks fairly healthy. One can imagine him hefting tires and fixing brakes at the Hermiston Les Schwab. Growing up in Boardman, he loved

long-distance running and continued to run and bike for exercise as an adult.

So far, Jeff says life hasn't changed too much, although he's had to dial it down. He is taking off the winter from work because the cold air affects his lungs. It takes longer to complete physical tasks such as mowing the lawn.

A close look at his hands shows purple fingers, a symptom of Raynaud's disease, which he's had for the past 16 years. Raynaud's is linked with scleroderma.

Despite the grim reality of his condition, at least outwardly, Jeff's outlook seems

as bright as the tree that glows in his living room. He and Rebecca are humbled by the supporters who are working to raise funds for the stem cell transplant or just offering words of encouragement.

"It has been amazing," Rebecca said. "People near and far have reached out to us."

Flyers hanging around town list several options for those interested in helping. Look for donation boxes at Les Schwab, Shell stations or Ace Hardware, deposit to the "Donations for Jeff Sepulveda" account at Bank of Eastern Oregon branches,

go to www.gofundme.com/jeffs-scleroderma-battle, pay five dollars for a "Fight for Jeff" wristband or attend a fundraising dinner at 5 p.m., Feb. 9 at the Port of Morrow Conference Center. To purchase tickets or donate an auction item, call Tia Sepulveda at 541-314-3509 or Dawn Coleman at 509-308-3666.

Rebecca advocated for Jeff on the GoFundMe site.

"We need a miracle and all your prayers," she wrote. "There is nothing I won't do to keep my husband and the father of my girls around as long as possible. Please hug your loved ones. God bless you all."

Electricity: Conservation measures can take a bite out of electric bills

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time of year. Students walking home from Hermiston High School also complement the decorations.

Katie Wallace, a residential spokesperson for Energy Trust of Oregon, said family visiting for the holidays might increase a customer's energy usage too.

"People may be doing more laundry, with houseguests," she said.

Since most of the energy for a load of laundry comes from heating the water for the cycle, Wallace said people can conserve energy by washing clothes on the cold setting. They can also air-dry clothes, or run cycles in the dryer back-to-back to take advantage of the hot air already trapped inside the dryer from the first load.

When it comes to keeping warm this time of year, Wallace said keeping blinds and drapes open during the day helps utilize sunlight to heat the house, and closing the blinds after dark traps heat in. Placing rugs on bare floors can trap heat.

Energy Trust of Oregon recommends setting your thermostat between 58 and 62 degrees at night or when everyone will be at work all day, and 65 to 68 degrees while you're home.

"That can help keep you comfortable but also save some energy," she said.

Steve Meyers, spokesperson for Umatilla Electric Company, said for every degree lower that people set their thermostat in the winter, they can save about 2 percent on their heating bill. Lowering your thermostat by 10 degrees every night instead of keeping it running at the same temperature while everyone is asleep can reduce your month's bill by 10 to 20 percent.

As people consider low-



The family cat hangs out near the plug-ins that electrify Pete Rosenberg's Christmas display outside his Highland Avenue home. The Hermiston man pays about \$20 extra each month for the additional electricity.

ering the temperature in their home, Meyers said getting rid of drafts can make a big difference in their comfort level. UEC provides a free home energy audit, and one of the first things they do is recommend sealing up air leaks with caulk or other means.

"A lot of homes can be really leaky around the windows and doors and things like dryer vents, and it can be pretty easy and inexpensive to fix that," he said.

Adding insulation in the attic can be more time-consuming and expensive, but there are rebates and tax credits available. Meyers said when he fixed the insulation in his own 1970s-era Hermiston home, he was able to use those incentives to cut the cost in half, and it made a "dramatic" difference to the comfort of his home in addition to saving money on heat.

Both Wallace and Meyers said small conservation measures, like setting the dishwasher to air-dry mode and unplugging devices when not in use, all add up.

When it comes to Christmas decorations, Meyers said he highly recommends people replace their old incandescent-style strings of lights with LED technology. In addition to using less energy, LED bulbs last many times longer and are safer to use on dry trees because they don't get as hot.

"A lot of LED Christmas lights on the market are notably cheaper to operate than the old style," he said.

Last year the *Washington Post* ran an analysis of Christmas light costs, based on the premise of running a string of lights for 12 hours a day for 45 days at a cost of 12 cents per kilowatt hour (thanks to plentiful hydro-power, most utilities in the

area charge closer to 7 cents).

The *Post* found that one string of 25 large incandescent bulbs would add \$15.12 to the user's power bill, while a string of 25 large LED bulbs would cost 21 cents. A string of 100 mini incandescent bulbs would cost \$3.53 to run, while 100 mini LED lights would cost 41 cents.

It may seem counterintuitive for organizations that make their money by selling electricity to offer up programs and information to help people use less electricity. But Meyers said building power plants is "expensive and risky" so electric utilities would rather see people conserve. Plus, he said, they want people to be able to afford to live in the area and farmers to be able to afford to keep their pumps going.

"When customers are doing well, UEC is doing well," he said.

There are ways that people can evaluate their own energy use, if they're not interested in UEC's free energy audit. Wallace pointed to a free online home energy review available on Energy Trust of Oregon's website. It asks questions about a home or apartment's age, size, heating system and other relevant questions before giving a customized list of recommendations for ways to conserve more energy.

There are programs through the state, Energy Trust, UEC and other power providers that provide low-interest loans, rebates, tax credits and other assistance for conservation projects, such as buying a more energy-efficient appliance.

More utilities are installing new "smart meters," which give customers detailed reports of how much power they use every hour. That allows them to see what behaviors cause a spike in usage and what conservation measures work best. Hermiston Energy Services recently installed the meters for all of its customers, and Pacific Power is about halfway through installing smart meters throughout its service area.

Other cost-saving tips from Energy Trust of Oregon and Umatilla Electric Cooperative include:

- Phone, laptop and tablet chargers use electricity even when they're not charging a device, so unplug them when they're not in use.

- Plug electronics like your television, DVD player, computer and printer into power strips that can be easily turned off when not in use.

- Let hot foods cool down before refrigerating or freezing them so your fridge doesn't have to work so hard to cool down.

- Make sure hot air is flowing freely from your heating system by regularly cleaning and replacing filters and make sure registers are clear.

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