

OUR VIEW

Legislature shouldn't let program expire

Jessica Barnett died when she was 17. She had started fainting when she was 12. It looked like a seizure. Her lips would go blue. She was put on epilepsy medication. The fainting didn't stop.

Her grandmother read an article about Long QT syndrome. The Mayo Clinic defines it as "a heart rhythm condition that can potentially cause fast, chaotic heartbeats. These rapid heartbeats might trigger you to suddenly faint. Some people with the condition have seizures. In some severe cases, LQTS can cause sudden death." The family thought that's what Jessica could have. It is treatable.

They had her tested. One test was positive. Some at a different clinic were ruled negative. Her doctors didn't believe that was what she had.

Jessica fainted again one day. It was a bad episode. Paramedics couldn't revive her and she died.

Genetic testing after Jessica was dead confirmed she had Long QT syndrome. Her parents wanted answers. They called the CEO of the hospital to try an arrange a meeting with her doctors. They were denied, so they decided to sue.

Her parents gathered up her medical records. Jessica's mother discovered the cardiologist never even looked at one of the tests. It was only sent to her general practitioner because that was the hospital's practice. Other test were apparently misread. The family was tested. Her father had it as well, though showed no symptoms.

A lawsuit was settled out of court. Another 18 months after the lawsuit was settled and five years after Jessica's death, the parents finally got to meet with her doctors. They didn't know the family had requested to meet with them. They had not been told.

"The physicians jaws dropped open. They were thinking: 'If we'd actually spoken to this family we may not have had to go through litigation,'" Jessica's mother said. "They were right. All we ever wanted was to have our questions answered and know they were making changes so this wouldn't happen again."

The Oregon Patient Safety Commission discussed this case and cases like it. This case was from Canada. All those details we provided are courtesy of the efforts of the Canadian Patient Safety Institute and Jessica's family. Where it happened, though, does not matter so much as what can be learned from it.

Medical errors and mistakes where patients are harmed are going to happen. Oregon actually has a model that allows families to get answers when medical errors occur — outside of a courtroom.

Passed in 2013 by the Oregon Legislature, the early discussion and resolution system allows for an open conversation between patients, families and medical providers when serious harm occurs. It creates confidentiality protections. Participants can speak candidly and reconciliation can be found without an adversarial lawsuit. That can encourage that improvements are made in patient safety. It can lower costs in the medical system. And families can get answers. Analysis of the program's performance is convincing. You can find more about it at the Oregon Patient Safety Commission's website.

But the program will go away without action by the Legislature. It is scheduled to sunset on Dec. 23, 2023. Senate Bill 110 introduced at the request of Gov. Kate Brown and the Oregon Patient Safety Commission would get rid of the sunset provision. It was state Sen. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, who moved the bill be sent to the Senate floor for a vote with a recommendation that it pass. It should.



Foster home need greater than ever



ADAM
RODAKOWSKI
OTHER VIEWS

One harsh reality of the pandemic often goes unnoticed: the continued need for foster parents.

Similar to many regions across the state, Eastern Oregon faces a critical shortage of foster homes for youths in need. Unlike many other areas, however, these rural and frontier communities have a history of joining together to address complex challenges facing their most vulnerable populations. We don't see it as an "agency" problem to fix, but rather find support through community collaborations and from the care of foster families.

In Oregon, an average of 7,345 children are in foster care on a daily basis, according to state data from 2019. Greater Oregon Behavioral Health Inc. (GOBHI) is a foster care program that provides homes for youths in local communities involved in the child welfare system or for those youths being supported by their local community mental health program. Our agency certifies foster families and works in partnership with the Oregon Department of Human Services Child Welfare to provide additional support services to youths and our foster families.

The ongoing need for foster families is well known. However, the pandemic

has increased uncertainty for both youths in foster care and foster families. Despite this challenge, the people caring for foster youths are making remarkable accomplishments in the lives of youths every day. These families make life-long positive impacts on the youths they serve, and are crucial to the success of our communities.

I'm honored to work with and support our foster families. Whether the child they serve stays with them for a few days or becomes a permanent member of the family, foster families have the unique ability to be the stable, supportive adults during a challenging time in the life of a child.

That leads us to the common question: How does the system work? GOBHI is licensed by the state of Oregon to certify and provide homes for youths in local communities who are involved in the child welfare system, or are receiving care from their local community mental health program. We certify homes for children and teens ages 4 to 17. In 2019, we certified 54 homes in 18 counties.

GOBHI's Therapeutic Foster Care program is a higher level of service and support than you would find through traditional foster care. We empower foster families to provide a safe environment that supports a healing process for our youths. Foster families receive training and ongoing support to help them create that type of environment. Training topics include Trauma Informed Care, de-escalation techniques, working with biological families, cultural

awareness, and evidence-based parenting practices. Each family receives an assigned case manager to support them and the youths in their home. Our team is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to provide support and guidance.

Help doesn't stop at the case management level. Foster Plus is a 10-social service agency collaboration. Its purpose is to connect kids in need with the support and stability of committed, caring foster families. GOBHI leads this collaborative group dedicated to increasing the number of safe foster homes and supports other agencies to improve services to children.

The positive impact that a foster parent can have on a child lasts a lifetime. We often hear stories of children who may have spent less than six months in a foster home, but later in life contacted their foster parent to express their gratitude.

If you have wanted to find a way to help children — especially those children in your own community — this is a way to do so. You will be ensuring that all kids in Eastern Oregon know they are wanted and safe during a very scary time in their lives.

Everyone can help in ways small and large. We welcome anyone who's ready to make a change.

Adam Rodakowski is the director of Greater Oregon Behavioral Health Inc.'s Therapeutic Foster Care program. Patrick Mulvihill, GOBHI communications coordinator, also contributed to this column.

YOUR VIEWS

Oregon's River Democracy Act should be celebrated

Our family has lived in and loved Baker Valley since we settled here after World War II. My mom and dad built our family home, raised cattle and worked to support the community here. This wild and verdant country and the rivers that sustain it are what we have loved most about this place.

I was happy to join thousands of Oregonians in nominating local rivers for protection under Wyden's proposed "River Democracy Act." I know many friends and neighbors who did the same.

I understand concerns regarding new public lands protections but the facts don't support the most common fears. Read the bill, and you will find that Senator Wyden's visionary proposal does not affect private property rights, reduce access or stop grazing, logging or mining.

The bill does recognize the extraordinary value of our wild, life giving rivers which are also our most valuable long-term resource. Like all groundbreaking proposals, successful implementation requires thoughtful planning and local engagement throughout the process.

I urge you to stay tuned and stay

involved. Protecting this resource is not a land grab, rather it is passing on to future generations what was passed on to us. It preserves what makes our part of the world so special. I can think of no better way to honor the legacy of those who have gone before us and ensure a vibrant future for those who will follow us.

Robin Coen
Baker City

Allowing indoor dining without vaccinating service industry workers is risky

It's been a tough year for us all. We crave any shred of pre-pandemic "normal." We want an escape. That is completely understandable.

That desire does not justify putting service industry workers' health at risk. By allowing indoor dining without vaccinating service industry workers, Gov. Brown is forcing Oregonians into unsafe work conditions. She is putting our collective desire for escape and normalcy ahead of the lives of our fellow Oregonians.

While eating in a restaurant, a diner

occupies that space for only an hour or two. But the servers, the cooks and the rest of staff are there for eight-plus hours and interact with hundreds of people in that time. The high risk to their health during this pandemic has been well documented.

Instead of forcing workers into dangerous working conditions, Gov. Brown and all of our elected officials should be fighting to provide financial support to our struggling restaurants and their employees.

Since our elected officials are neglecting their responsibility to protect these members of our community, what can we do as individuals? Buy takeout. Buy gift cards. Support our local restaurants however we can. Demand that our senators, our representatives, our governor and our county commissioners do more to protect us.

But please don't put the health of these workers, our fellow Oregonians, at risk just to feel normal for an hour.

And Gov. Brown, vaccinate these frontline workers. May 1 is not soon enough if you are allowing indoor dining now.

Sean Lerner
La Grande