

EDITORIAL

Deciding who gets health care when it's scarce

When there isn't enough health care to go around, how should Oregon decide who gets it?

Would flipping a coin be better than what Oregon does now?

A state committee for the Oregon Health Authority is looking at how medical providers should make triage decisions. It meets again this week.

The concern is the current tools Oregon has for making triage decisions were not developed with much input from the community, there may be discrimination, the tools are at risk for bias and there is just not much experience or research to lean on.

For instance, during the peaks of the pandemic across the country there were sometimes hard choices that needed to be made about who gets access to ventilators. So if the pandemic fell disproportionately on disadvantaged groups, did the decisions about who gets a ventilator exacerbate that problem?

The state could take various approaches for triage:

- It could choose survivability – what saves the most lives.
- It could aim to reduce or eliminate health inequities.
- It could try to reduce the risk for essential workers.
- It could do it randomly, flip a coin.
- Or it could do some mix of the above.

The approach most often used in the country is survivability. That is typically based on what is called a sequential organ failure assessment, SOFA. It looks at various indicators of health and body function. For instance, one part of that assessment is the Glasgow Coma Score. It's a way of looking at levels of consciousness and brain function. Patients doing poorly on that and other tests would be more likely to be denied resources based on the assumption they would be less likely to survive.

But there have been equity concerns about how that is used. People with disabilities may do more poorly on scores like the Glasgow Coma Score. And sequential organ failure assessment has also raised other concerns. One study looked at 2,982 patients admitted with COVID-19 in the Yale New Haven Health System. Non-Hispanic Black patients had greater odds of having higher SOFA scores than Non-Hispanic white patients. So they would be more likely to be denied resources.

Oregon's existing triage guidelines try to recognize the limitations of the various approaches. It uses a modified organ failure assessment. It makes adjustments for people with chronic diseases and disabilities. There's a pause built in to try to look for biases. And if multiple individuals get the same score for prioritization, coins could be flipped.

The committee, the Resource Allocation Advisory Committee, is not going to make a final decision this week on what approach Oregon should use. And it is going to allow public comment.

What causes your concern about Oregon's triage approach? What should Oregon's policy be? The email for the committee is OHAResourceallocation@dhsosha.state.or.us.

■ Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the Baker City Herald. Columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the Baker City Herald.

MARGULIES

©2022 www.jimmymargulies.com



YOUR VIEWS

Mental health crisis could have local effects

The people of Baker County received several million dollars recently from a federal program to compensate for losses during the government mandated shutdown of the economy and society due to the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic emergency. Baker County Commissioners decided to spend a large portion of our emergency money, \$1.45 million of it, to payoff a 70-acre land purchase. That's about \$20,750 per acre for ground that had been used as farmland. And, it was reported that the commissioners have no set plans for the property. If there are no plans, then why was the purchase made with such importance and urgency that they'd spend our COVID emergency money to pay it off?

I notice also that New Directions Northwest — NDNW — recently received a large amount of money from the federal government and I think it was some sort of housing grant. NDNW contracts with Baker County to provide this county's mental health program under the title New Directions Northwest Behavioral Health and Wellness-NDNWBHW. NDNWBHW operates under Oregon's "Community Mental Health Treatment Law" passed back in the 1990s. These programs, like the one in Baker County run by NDNWBHW, brings into the communities the people who would once have been housed in a lockdown, state-run mental hospital. As you can imagine, NDNWBHW clients sometimes have difficulty securing housing.

It is these community mental health laws and county contracted programs that I think have created what the bureaucrats call a "homeless crisis." It is not a "homeless crisis" it is a "mental health crisis" created by the failing system of community mental health treatment. Severely mentally ill patients and society at large are no longer protected by housing the mental ill in state-run,

lockdown mental hospitals. Instead, severely mentally ill adults in Oregon are usually arrested, cycled through the legal system, and eventually placed into community mental health programs and shipped into small towns like Baker City and their dangerous and/or unacceptable behaviors are controlled by prescribing to them powerful psychotropic drugs.

Powder River Correctional Facility, additionally, has brought a constant revolving population of at least 286 inmates to town and New Directions brings in hundreds more not only through its contract as the county's mental health program provider but through numerous programs for the transient, drug addicted, and incarcerated population. This brings clients in from all over Oregon and beyond. If you see a young mother pushing a stroller in Baker City there's a 90% chance it will be an incarcerated woman brought to town for the incarcerated mother program. Most young men in town between ages 19 and 30 are likely incarcerated or enrolled in rehabilitation of one form or another.

We no longer are allowed to harvest trees in this region, so we've shifted to harvesting human lives and Baker County and city have embraced the human harvest industry. Boy, I bet there are some current day regrets for this town passing on Eastern Oregon Normal School, known today as EOU.

That 70 acres urgently purchased by Baker County sits fairly close to New Directions' treatment empire on Midway Drive. It is conceivable that there could be plans for the organization to expand toward Hughes Lane. With all the talk lately of "affordable housing" in Baker County and with New Directions handing out affordable housing surveys, it's even conceivable that such a land purchase could be used to build housing for the overflow of the mentally ill living on the streets of Portland. If you follow the style of Oregon's government, the good of the many outweigh the comfort of the few

— Bakerites are few but many are the mentally ill on the streets of Oregon's western cities. So, it's conceivable that local government might foster a plan to house a couple hundred or thousand of Portland, Medford, and Eugene's mentally ill adults.

Hope not.

Brian Addison
Baker City

Based on fire dept. mess, Garrick best choice for county

Recently councilor Alderson criticized candidate Dan Garrick for not favoring forming a countywide fire district. This spring I was very much in favor of forming a fire district when the city was struggling with the burden of managing an ambulance service. At that time I felt forming a district was the best way to utilize the efficiency of having dual trained firefighters and EMTs. The incentive was to put the ambulance service under the management of a district board, allowing them to capture the revenue stream generated by providing ambulance service. Those conditions no longer exist. I pleaded with city council to keep the fire department whole continuing to provide ambulance service long enough to pursue creating a district. My pleas along with those of the majority of citizens was ignored. Now that the city fire department no longer provides ambulance and has lost a significant portion of their dual trained staff it doesn't make sense to form a district. The city has an understaffed fire department relying more and more on volunteers, the only thing the city did retain is the same 1.2 million dollar liability to fund the department. Now councilor Alderson wants to use the county rural fire departments and the County Chair position to fix the mess. I strongly urge everyone to vote for Dan Garrick for county commissioner position 3.

Kody Justus
Baker City

CONTACT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS

President Joe Biden: The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington, D.C. 20500; 202-456-1111; to send comments, go to www.whitehouse.gov.

U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley: D.C. office: 313 Hart Senate Office Building, U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-3753; fax 202-228-3997. Portland office: One World Trade Center, 121 S.W. Salmon St. Suite 1250, Portland, OR 97204; 503-326-3386; fax 503-326-2900. Baker City office, 1705 Main St., Suite 504, 541-278-1129; merkley.senate.gov.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden: D.C. office: 221 Dirksen Senate Office Building,

Washington, D.C., 20510; 202-224-5244; fax 202-228-2717. La Grande office: 105 Fir St., No. 210, La Grande, OR 97850; 541-962-7691; fax, 541-963-0885; wyden.senate.gov.

U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz (2nd District): D.C. office: 1239 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515, 202-225-6730; fax 202-225-5774. Medford office: 14 N. Central Avenue Suite 112, Medford, OR 97500; Phone: 541-776-4646; fax: 541-779-0204; Ontario office: 2430 S.W. Fourth Ave., No. 2, Ontario, OR 97914; Phone: 541-709-2040. bentz.house.gov.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown: 254 State

Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; www.governor.oregon.gov.

Oregon State Treasurer Tobias Read: oregon.treasurer@ost.state.or.us; 350 Winter St. NE, Suite 100, Salem OR 97301-3896; 503-378-4000.

Oregon Attorney General Ellen F. Rosenblum: Justice Building, Salem, OR 97301-4096; 503-378-4400.

State Sen. Lynn Findley (R-Ontario): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., S-403, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1730. Email: Sen.LynnFindley@oregonlegislature.gov

State Rep. Mark Owens (R-Crane):

Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., H-475, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1460. Email: Rep.MarkOwens@oregonlegislature.gov

Baker City Hall: 1655 First Street, P.O. Box 650, Baker City, OR 97814; 541-523-6541; fax 541-524-2049. City Council meets the second and fourth Tuesdays at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers. Councilors Jason Spriet, Kerry McQuisten, Shane Alderson, Joanna Dixon, Kenyon Damschen, Johnny Waggoner Sr. and Dean Guyer.

Baker City administration: 541-523-6541. Jonathan Cannon, city manager; Ty Duby, police chief; Sean Lee, fire chief; Michelle Owen, public works director.

COLUMN

Look past midterm crazy season for inflation relief

BY BRUCE YANDLE

Though apparently dedicated to winning the battle against inflation, Fed Chairman Powell is fighting a lonely battle that will be difficult to win, at least with an election taking place. There are limits to what the Fed can do when Congress and the White House are busy printing more money. Yes, even after a six-month long Fed effort to raise interest rates, U.S. inflation is still running at a hot 8.2%.

It will take time and restraint from Washington before things have a chance to calm down. Because inflation's causes lie in politics as much as economics, let's look past election-dominated 2022 for possible relief. There are some early data to support this hope.

For all the talk about what's behind the diminishing buying power of our money — war, supply chains, energy prices — inflation can still be thought of simply. Flood the economy with enough money and it will start to lose

its value. That's how White House and congressional efforts to forgive debt and increase spending have been counteracting the Fed's action.

In just the last six months, the Biden administration has initiated massive student debt write-offs as well as forgiven billions of dollars of farmer-owed debt and assisted drought-distressed people in the Southwest by way of the misnamed "Inflation Reduction Act." (It is worth noting that the Wharton school's dispassionate review of the act found the effect on inflation to be "indistinguishable from zero.")

Whatever one thinks of these policies, they mean that while the Fed is hitting the brakes, the White House — perhaps fearful of what midterm elections will bring — is goosing the accelerator. And Heaven help us to get past efforts by Democrats and Republicans alike to spend and score political wins with their constituents and secure majority positions in the House and

It is for this reason that some are suggesting the Fed should be happy with 4% inflation rather than 2%. After all, this thinking goes, living with a little more inflation might be preferable to sustaining the bitter medicine of an economy slowed down by the Fed. But it's also possible that war-caused disruptions in energy and other markets will eventually disappear, making the job of hitting the ideal target easier (though by no means painless).

Senate. Once midterm "crazy season" is over, it's clearly possible that some of the inflation heat may subside.

We can also see data backing this up. Inflation, as reflected by the Con-

sumer Price Index (CPI), could hit the healthier 2% range again late in 2023. Hope comes from examining another measurement — M2 — which tracks the U.S. money supply by accounting for U.S. cash, deposit assets and other near-money accounts.

The money supply exploded in early 2020 with COVID-19 relief spending; CPI-registered inflation accelerated about 12 months later. It was a textbook case of too much money chasing too few goods. Now, the latest M2 reading is back at a pre-COVID level. That suggests more normal inflation levels about 12 months from now.

Of course, some of those aforementioned other inflation factors must still be noted.

There is always more to the story, including Ukraine-war driven energy price increases, supply chain disruptions, and labor market challenges that emerged during the pandemic and remain to deal with.

It is for this reason that some are suggesting the Fed should be happy with 4% inflation rather than 2%. After all, this thinking goes, living with a little more inflation might be preferable to sustaining the bitter medicine of an economy slowed down by the Fed. But it's also possible that war-caused disruptions in energy and other markets will eventually disappear, making the job of hitting the ideal target easier (though by no means painless).

Yes, we can be optimistic that inflation will be under control in 2023. That is, if the Fed is not forced to hit the brakes harder to offset an election-year spending binge. Let's just hope Congress will not be inspired to write another so-called Inflation Reduction Act any time soon.

■ Bruce Yandle is a distinguished adjunct fellow with the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, dean emeritus of the Clemson College of Business, and a former executive director of the Federal Trade Commission.