

## To Your Health!

By Judy Hargis, P.A., and Audeen Wagner



### Health Care on a Tight Budget??

How can people manage health care costs and still provide proper care for their families in these days of rising costs? It is said that

even if you are in perfect health, just thinking about the cost of health care or reeling under the pressure of health care bills can make you a little sick. If you have no medical insurance, or are under-insured, it might be hard to see the humor in that statement! Hospital visits and prescriptions have gone up three times the national rate of inflation over the past few years, and average out-of-pocket expenses for medical care for employees have more than doubled over a 5-year period, while wages have increased only 18 percent. The result of all this is that a large number of Americans say that high medical costs routinely force them to neglect doctor's visits and skip prescription refills.

"That's crazy. You don't have to choose between sound health and financial security," says a Money Magazine report. So, the question is: How can I cut healthcare costs? Here are some tips:

- As many as eight of every 10 hospital bills contain errors which increase the total amount due. So, check all your statements carefully, and keep good records of visits, lab tests, medications, etc. If you find a mistake, contact the billing office requesting a corrected bill. Itemized, please.

- Practice good health measures at home: Cleanliness (wash those hands before eating or preparing food); Drink less alcohol (if you routinely drink four to five drinks at a sitting, you'll average \$900 more in medical expenses in a year compared to those who don't drink at all); Quit smoking; Get some exercise daily, and stay in shape; Eat right (take your lunch to work and save \$1000/year). In other words, a sincere attempt at living a healthy life can drastically cut healthcare costs. Makes sense, doesn't it?

- More about smoking: A pack-a-day smoker spends about \$1,500 per year, but when you consider those extra healthcare costs resulting from smoking, it's staggering: one

statistic says as much as \$1,600 more a year than for nonsmokers. And that is not taking into account those catastrophic illnesses!

- Take advantage of health screenings for cholesterol, diabetes, hypertension and some cancers, that are offered free by health systems such as Tuality, OHSU, Legacy and Providence. You can find information about these screenings by calling them or going online. Remember that early detection is key to positive outcomes and reduced healthcare costs for you and your family.

- No drug coverage: There is a website called Partnership for Prescription Assistance (pparx.org), which has links to patient assistance programs. Discounts are offered on more than 2,500 medications (many require a statement of need but some are open to all income levels.) And, ask for generic drugs whenever you can – they cost about 1/3 less than their brand name equivalents. Incidentally, make sure that you follow the doctor's instructions on taking medications – if you are supposed to take all of the prescription, even if you are feeling well, do it – if you don't, the result may be problems later on, which will cost even more!

- Make sure that you get the preventive healthcare recommended for your age group, including pap smears, clinical breast exams, mammograms, skin exams, prostate and colorectal cancer screenings, etc. You can go online to WEBMD to find the latest recommendations, or talk to your healthcare provider about these and other preventive measures. This includes those well-baby checkups and immunizations for children, too. Also, keeping on top of chronic medical conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, will probably prevent more serious problems later.

#### ESSENTIAL HEALTH CLINIC

Every Monday and Thursday evening, the Essential Health Clinic, at 266 W. Main Street, Hillsboro, serves uninsured and low-income individuals and families with medical problems. The volunteer staff identifies and treats such medical prob-

lems as asthma, acute infections, minor injuries, and much more. (Of course, if you have a real medical emergency, call 911 immediately.)

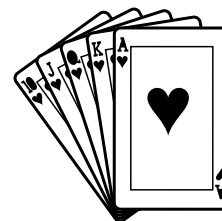
Patients are instructed to report to the clinic at 4:30 p.m., where they are registered and get a short consultation with a registered nurse. Patients are seen by volunteer doctors, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, nurses or other professionals. The clinic sees an average of 35 patients over a 3-hour period.

This clinic is offering a huge service to patients who do not have insurance – all free of charge. The clinic is operated through volunteer services and donations.

Learn to reduce your stress level, and find ways to PLAY! Never underestimate the value of simple lifestyle changes.

We welcome your comments and questions. Please contact us at: To Your Health!, The Independent, 725 Bridge Street, Vernonia, OR 97064, or email: health@the-independent.net.

## It's Ridge Riders Poker Ride time

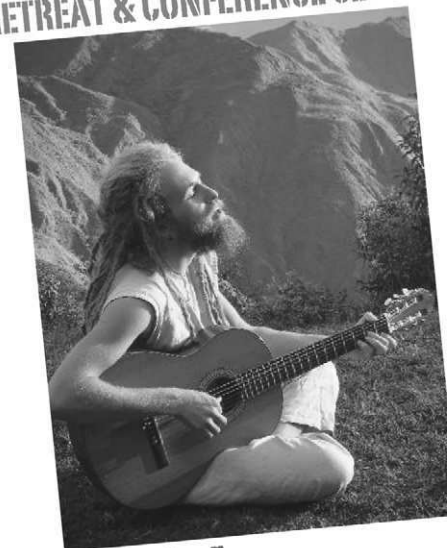


The Vernonia Ridge Riders annual Poker Ride will be held June 30. Signups start at 8:00 a.m. at the arena in Anderson

Park and the last riders go out at 11:00 a.m. Poker hands are \$5 each. The Grand Prize is two nights in Lincoln City plus \$100 cash. Everyone is welcome to participate.

Montana Silver Belt Buckles are on display at Vernonia Hardware with this year's theme of "American Spirit." Raffle tickets are \$1 each.

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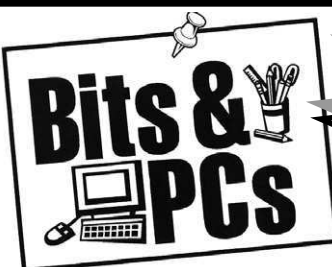
Join us. Gates open at 5 PM. Concert starts at 7:30 PM. Pre-concert BBQ Picnic: local, organic, with many vegetarian options. Overnight accommodations available.

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