

To Your Health!

By Judy Hargis, P.A



**PATIENT
ADVOCACY**

Facilitating better care for patients: There was a time when healthcare seemed simple. We knew our family doctor well and he was familiar with our health needs. We often

paid cash for our care and sometimes even bartered for it. Technology, medications, and treatment options were limited. Many people had no health insurance, but the costs for our care were reasonable. Now the world of medicine is changing at a rapid pace. It is hard to keep up with the methods of treatment and how healthcare is delivered to the consumer. Navigating the complexities of the healthcare system can be overwhelming to even the most knowledgeable patient. Dealing with a diagnosis of a serious or life threatening illness or multiple chronic illnesses can seem impossible. Imagine the challenges facing a person living with a mental or physical disability, or an elderly patient trying to understand the implications of multiple medications, diagnostic tests, medications and treatments. Then there are the issues around long term care and end of life decisions. Add to that, navigating the cost of care and insurance plans; it can feel insurmountable to patients and their loved ones.

We know that patients who are well informed and working in partnership with their health care provider, help to ensure the best treatment outcomes. Patient advocacy has been an emerging resource in recent years and has been making a difference in the lives of many patients and their families. There now are patient advocacy groups that help patients and families access resources and services. There are patient advocates who can be hired to work one-on-one with patients and their loved ones. Patient advocacy is a valuable, growing profession. The patient advocate can work with patients to help them with medical care issues, insurance, home health, long term care placements, elder assistance and end of life decisions. They can act as a liaison

between the patient and their health care provider and often accompany patients to doctors' appointments. They can sort out insurance claims and appeals, research treatment plans and can frequently help patients access specialists.

There are great resources and services available through the patient advocate organizations such as the PAF (Patient Advocacy Foundation) which can be accessed by phone or on-line. They provide a wealth of information and resources, and have programs available including the Co-Pay Relief Program (CPR) which provides direct financial support to insured patients, including Medicare part-D beneficiaries. They have counselors available to guide patients through the enrollment process and a dedicated, secure website for health care providers to enroll their patients. PAF is a great starting point for patients and their families. There are many patient advocates and patient advocacy groups available today. PAF can help assess individual situations and find the right services, dependent on patient needs. You can find them at www.PAF.com.

There are many rough waters ahead for healthcare and the impact on all of us can be unsettling. Our healthcare system is not going to be consumer friendly anytime soon. In the meantime, patient advocacy groups can be a tremendous resource in assisting patients to access care which will lead to better health outcomes. These programs can provide patients with real support as they deal with the challenges faced with medical issues in their lives.

I want to thank Audeen Wagner for working on this column with me over the the last few years. She has been a teacher, mentor and wonderful friend. I am happy to share with you that I spoke with Laura Nichols in the fall and she is interested in writing a few columns for To Your Health! It is a wonderful opportunity for her to share some of her wealth of information and reconnect with the community. Some students from Pacific Northwest School of Health Sciences will write, as well.

As always, I would love to answer questions and hear feedback from our readers. If there is a health topic that you would like more information on, please let us know. You can reach me at health@the-independent.net.

“Choking game” can kill children

Oregon Public Health officials want parents and health-care providers to be aware of a dangerous and potentially fatal activity in which many young teens are engaging.

According to the Oregon Healthy Teens Survey, conducted every other year by Oregon Public Health, as many as 2,600 eighth graders in the state have participated in the “choking game,” also sometimes called Pass-Out, Space Monkey, Flat Liner and Black-out. The survey also found that one in three eighth graders had heard of someone participating in this activity and that six percent reported participating themselves.

Oregon is the first state to systematically assess this behavior. “The Oregon Healthy Teens Survey is a key tool for monitoring health behaviors among our youth, and without public health conducting this kind of surveillance study, most people would be unaware of this threat to the health of our children,” said Mel Kohn, MD, MPH, acting director at Oregon Public Health. Kohn also noted that injuries are the leading cause of death for children and young adults.

The “choking game” is an activity in which people strangle themselves using a belt, tie, scarf or similar item, or teens strangle each other using their hands, to achieve euphoria. After a short time people can pass out, which can cause injury, long-term disability or death.

“Many people will be surprised at how widespread this dangerous behavior is,” says Kohn, “so parents, healthcare providers and others who work with teens should be alert for signs of participation in strangulation activities, particularly in young teens.”

Sarah Ramowski at Oregon Public Health, lead author of a report on these data published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report for the week of January 11, says that warning signs that a child may be participating in this activity include:

- Unexplained marks on the neck
- Bloodshot eyes
- Ropes, scarves, belts tied to bedroom furniture or door-

- knobs
- Unexplained presence of leashes or bungee cords
- Pinpoint bleeding spots under the skin on the face, especially the eyelids
- Discussion or mention of this activity
- Disorientation, especially after spending time alone.

According to the CDC report there have been 82 deaths occurring in 31 states from this activity from 1995 to 2007. In Oregon, an Eagle Point sixth-grader died in 2006 due to this activity.

**Columbia
County
Mental Health
800-294-5211**

**Suicide
Hotline
1-800-784-2433
or
1-800-273-
TALK(8255)**

**Domestic
Abuse
Hotline
503-397-6161
or
866-397-6161**

**You Are
Not Alone**

Are you trying to care for a loved one who is memory challenged?
Please consider
The Gardens Enhanced Care

We Feature:

- Small, Cozy Neighborhoods
- Secure Environment
- Universal Caregivers
- “Best Friends Approach”
- “Memory” Stations
- Activities
- Meals Served Family Style
- Secure Outside Areas

The Grove & The Gardens
ASSISTED LIVING & ENHANCED CARE COMMUNITY

Come see what we have to offer!
Call 503-357-9780
to schedule a tour today.

3334 22ND AVENUE • FOREST GROVE

**Terry's
Gym**

A COMPLETE
CO-ED GYM
FACILITY

503-901-1705
16720 Noakes Rd Vernonia, OR