

To Your Health!

By Judy Hargis, P.A



The Lost "Art" of Practicing Medicine

I often find myself thinking about what we have gained through the dramatic changes in our healthcare system. I also find myself considering what has been lost.

This month, Laura Nichols PA-C will celebrate a birthday. Laura dedicated many years of her life to practicing medicine in rural underserved areas. She believed that her commitment to her patients included her commitment to her community. I would like to dedicate this column to her, and to other providers like her who are a dying breed. These "gems" are a reminder of what is missing in our health care system today.

They remind us of a time when healthcare providers knew your name, your family members and your history. They felt a connection to their patients and their families. They enjoyed practicing the art of medicine and welcomed the opportunity to be a part of our care. Patients were not seen as numbers, an RVU, a ten-minute appointment slot, or a body part needing a diagnosis.

They weren't a reflection of the bottom line or production. A patient was seen as a whole person with individual needs, unique personalities and circumstances. I had the privilege of working with Laura and I grew up in a time when health care was still about the "patient". We may live in a time with great technological and medical advances but we have lost something along the way.

We may have the most expensive health care in the world but is it actually the best?

We fall short in preventable deaths, infant mortality and life span in comparison to many other countries. Our health care system is based on a disease model with lack of adequate access to preventive health services. Many people are unable to access care at all. Many chronic medical conditions are poorly managed. We have a society of poor health and high obesity rates. We rate number one in the world in obesity. My patients often speak of their frustrations when trying to access healthcare due to lack of

continuity with a provider, brief visits, and providers who can't remember their names or health histories.

Some clinics affiliated with hospital systems are now charging their patients with a facility/room us-

age fee, in addition to their co-pays, when they see their Primary care provider. These fees are not covered by insurance and can run as high as \$50 to \$150 per office visit. This is an example of one more barrier to healthcare access. It has been proven that increasing the cost of healthcare does not improve the quality of healthcare.

Primary care providers are burning out and very few medical students are declaring family medicine as their practice choice. I believe family doctors are critical to good care. They are the gatekeepers and the heart of health care for many individuals and families. When I think of providers like Laura Nichols and some of the other providers I have known in the community that I come from, I am more convinced than ever that good health care has to be about the "patient". It does not belong in the hands of corporations and bean counters that have no sense of what is at stake.

Insurance companies and hospital systems run in this way only serve to drive up the cost of care. The only people who benefit are the CEOs with their high salaries, bonuses and golden parachutes. We all need to pay attention to the direction health care is taking in this country. It is easy to turn a blind eye when we still have health coverage in the current system but, every day, people are losing coverage or having to discontinue their insurance due to increasing costs.

If we continue on our current path, only the wealthy will be able to afford good care. This will impact the overall health of our country and the future of the health of our children. A viable health care system has to respond to the needs of the people it is designed to serve. It has to be equitable and fair in its provision of care, and committed to optimal health for everyone to be effective.

So I dedicate this column to Laura and to all the champions of healthcare, and community health, that came before her. I thank them for the nights they did not sleep, the vacations they did not take and the 24/7 care they gave to their patients and communities. They did not complain about the long hours or the busy days. They placed high value on the care they gave and the lives of their patients. It was never perceived as a burden. They made a difference in our lives and the lives of our loved ones.

We are not better off without them. We have lost something very important and that is the healing that a strong, long-term relationship with a trusted health care provider can give to us. Our health care system needs to heal itself and begin to get back to taking care of the "patient" again. If we don't find a way to change the current system, the health of this country will continue on this downhill spiral. I hope I am lucky enough to live long enough to see a comeback of the "Lauras" of health care and the re-emergence of providers practicing the ART of medicine. It would bring a new focus to providing high quality health care to the whole person, with medical advances being used more appropriately. The greatest benefit would be healthier people and a better quality of life for all.

As always, we appreciate your questions and comments. You can contact us at health@the-independent.net.

United Way allocates 2011 funds

United Way of Columbia County Board of Directors approved the 2011 allocations at their March board meeting, but most of the allocations were smaller this year because the agency reached only 80% of its goal, raising 9.25% less than last year.

This resulted in less money to allocate. Twenty-seven partner programs received a combined total of \$163,451, and an additional \$7040 in donor directed funds went to seventeen other non-profits for a total of \$170,491.

It is always a difficult job to allocate the available funds and much thought and work by the United Way Board of Directors, goes into making these decisions. The task was even more difficult this year.

Basic Human needs – food, shelter, utility assistance were given the highest priority. As always, the Board of Directors

and staff continue to work diligently to maintain a low overhead by leveraging in-kind donations, supplemental grants and volunteers to help support the many needs of our community.

"We sincerely thank all those who help support United Way of Columbia County in our efforts to work for the common good of this community. Whether you are a donor, or a volunteer, or both, we could not provide the support we do for this community without you. We appreciate your continued help and dedication to making a difference in Columbia County," said Director Kathye Beck.

Allocations for Vernonia included \$12,791 to Vernonia Cares Food Bank.

It is not too late to give. Donations and or pledges can be accepted at any time. For more information call 503-556-3614 or email uwcc@hotmail.com.

Terry's Gym
A COMPLETE CO-ED GYM FACILITY
503-901-1705
16720 Noakes Rd Vernonia, OR

<p>Columbia County</p> <p>Mental Health</p> <p>800-294-5211</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Suicide Hotline</p> <p>1-800-784-2433</p> <p>or</p> <p>1-800-273-TALK(8255)</p>	<p>Domestic Abuse Hotline</p> <p>503-397-6161</p> <p>or</p> <p>866-397-6161</p> <p>.....</p> <p>Military Helpline</p> <p>888-HLP-4-VET</p> <p>(888-457-4838)</p>
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