

# Serving the underserved

By Jennifer Willis

A study in the June 10 issue of "Health Affairs" reports the number of American adults with no or inadequate health insurance has risen 33 percent since 2003. Approximately 42 percent of American adults — 75 million people — are now either uninsured or have insufficient health insurance to cover medical expenses.

The Oregon Breast and Cervical Cancer Program is making sure uninsured and underinsured Oregon women have access to early detection and screening that could save their lives.

"It's having a big impact on women's health," says Yasmin Chotocruz, ND, who provides mammograms and cervical cancer screenings in her Northeast Portland office as part of the BCCP program. "Otherwise, these women would have no access to screening and early detection."

Rian Frachele, section manager for Women's and Reproductive Health within the Oregon Department of Human Services' Office of Family Health, estimates that 14 percent of Oregonians have no health insurance at all.

BCCP is part of the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program, funded through a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The program began screening women in Oregon in 1995. Across the state, 117 providers offer BCCP screening services, with 32 in Metro Portland (Multnomah, Clackamas and Washington counties) Additionally, there are 119 providers and facilities including surgeons, laboratories and imaging facilities contracted to offer ancillary services to BCCP clients.

Since she first started providing screening through BCCP in 2002, Dr. Chotocruz says she has seen at least 1,000 women — 600 in just the last two years. "It's a big portion of people. I see them every day," says Chotocruz, who estimates 30 percent of her screening patients come through BCCP.

The program targets women

ages 50 to 64 in particular for mammograms and cervical cancer screening.

"It's a hard-to-reach population," says Frachele. "They don't go for routine screenings. Our job is to get them in for pap, pelvic exams, and mammogram screenings."

Through BCCP, women over the age of 40 are eligible for breast and cervical cancer screening. Under the age of 40, women who are symptomatic for breast cancer qualify for breast cancer services only, thanks to funding from the Susan G. Komen for the Cure Oregon and SW Washington Affiliate. After age 65, Frachele says, Medicare kicks in.

To be eligible for BCCP services, women must be Oregon residents with a household income below 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Level — \$26,000 for a single person with no children; \$53,000 for a family of four. Women must be



uninsured, or be underinsured through policies with deductibles of \$500 or more and that do not pay for preventive health exams like mammograms.

While men are not screened for breast cancer through BCCP, the program does offer diagnostic services to men of all ages who are symptomatic for breast cancer. Men make up less than 1 percent of the people served by BCCP, and Frachele says only two or three symptomatic men each year are provided diagnostic services through the program.

BCCP serves an average of 6,000 women per year and has provided more than 35,000 mammograms since the pro-

gram's inception.

Participating providers offer screening services in their own offices. Frachele says county health departments and federally qualified health centers also offer screenings through BCCP.

"The goal of the program is to prevent, because we're doing screening on healthy women," says Chotocruz. "I am sure that the early intervention has saved many lives."

Chotocruz is bilingual, and the majority of her patients come from Portland's medically underserved Hispanic population. She also sees Russian patients through BCCP, with the assistance of interpreters.

## Catching cancer in time

If screenings through BCCP result in a diagnosis of cancer, patients are referred to the Breast and Cervical Cancer Medical Program, Frachele says, which allows women to have their treatment paid for through Oregon's Medicaid program.

"Not only are they paying for screening but they're also paying for many of the therapeutic procedures that need to be done," says Chotocruz. "If a woman comes in and there is an abnormal finding in a mammogram or in a clinical breast exam, then the patient is referred to a surgeon, or is referred for different procedures. This is all paid for."

Through the program, Chotocruz has diagnosed 10 women with breast cancer in the past year.

"It is making a real difference, because it's giving

the women the opportunity to prevent serious complications or serious diseases," she says, emphasizing the contrast between going to the doctor for prevention and going to the doctor when you're sick. "It's giving women who would otherwise not have access to these kinds of services because of cost."

By providing early detection and referrals and financial support for treatment to medically underserved women, Frachele says BCCP definitely has a positive impact on women's health.

"It's one of the programs we should be very proud of," she says. "We can't prevent cancer, but early detection saves lives."

## RATE HIKES

continued from page 3

contain healthcare costs, OHS would like to see more standardization of paperwork, "so providers have one form to fill out, so we as patients have one form to fill out," and public hearings on rate increases.

"We don't have a lot of information as patients and as consumers," Healey said. "These companies need to come before the public and actually justify their rates."

In some ways, Healey sees BlueCross's recent rate increases as an opportunity.

"I really hope that this serves as a call to action," said Healey, "to really work on holding our elected officials accountable to stand up to the powerful interests in healthcare. The Oregon Health Fund board [has] such a window of opportunity to really create a system in our state that delivers high-quality, affordable healthcare to all Oregonians.

These windows of opportunity

do not come around every day, and it would be a crying shame if we did not take advantage of this opportunity to create a healthcare system in Oregon that actually works for all of us."

The 26 percent individual health plan rate increase has been challenged by Portland resident Karen Kirsch. In response to her petition, a hearing on the matter will be held. So far, the date for the hearing has not been set. Cory Streisinger, Oregon insurance commissioner and director of the Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services, will make the final decision.

The July 1 press conference was sponsored by a coalition of organizations. In addition to Oregonians for Health Security, the sponsors included Oregon Small Business for Responsible Leadership, OSPIRG (Oregon State Public Interest Research Group), Oregon Health Action Campaign, United Seniors of Oregon, Oregon Consumer League, Oregon Action and Jobs with Justice.

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## NORTHWEST CANCER SUMMIT JULY 28 and 29

Cancer Care Resources will present the Northwest Cancer Summit, the first statewide summit for survivors and community leaders. It brings together an entire community of people affected by cancer, said Sue Frymark, R.N., executive director for Cancer Care Resources.

Monday is devoted to cancer survivors, caregivers and their families. Guest speaker Susan Leigh, a former nurse and a two-time cancer survivor, will speak on "The Power of Your Story." Guest speaker Kathryn Fitzpatrick from the Lance Armstrong Foundation will speak about Grassroots Advocacy.

Tuesday is geared toward business and government leaders including human resources professionals, medical professionals, legislative staff and insurers. There will be presentations about the long-term needs of cancer survivors and the impact of cancer in the workplace and on public policy. Each day there will be 25 exhibits as well as speakers from renowned cancer foundations and hospitals. Speakers include, Barney Speight, Oregon Health Fund; U.S. Senator Ron Wyden; Brandon Hayes-Lattin, M.D., director of the OHSU Cancer Institute Adolescent and Young Adult cancer program; Craig Nichols, M.D., Providence Cancer Program; and Betty Ferrell, R.N., Ph.D., F.A.A.N., research scientist from the City of Hope Comprehensive Cancer Center and The Institute of Medicine. Ferrell is a member of the National Cancer Policy Forum. She is known for her quality of life research in the areas of cancer survivorship and palliative care.

Monday is free for survivors and \$30 for co-survivors. The fee for Tuesday is \$50 for survivors and \$250 for all other attendees.

Cancer Care Resources, an innovative nonprofit, is dedicated to providing free help and hope to people with cancer and their families through community-based delivery of services.

The event is co-sponsored by the Lance Armstrong Foundation, Oregon Health & Science University Cancer Institute, The Standard, Oregon Partnership for Cancer Control and Adidas.

For more information contact Cancer Care Resources at 503-528-5236 or 866-528-5236 or visit [www.cancerresources.org](http://www.cancerresources.org). 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday and Tuesday, July 28-29, Oregon Convention Center, 777 N.E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.