

PRESS RELEASE

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OREGON LEGISLATORS BECOME OREGON HEALTH PLAN PATIENTS

Lawmakers learn what it's like to be on Medicaid in Oregon

SALEM – Each of Oregon's 90 legislators will become Oregon Health Plan patients as part of "A Day in the Life of an Oregon Health Plan Member," Tuesday, May 17, in the Oregon Capitol Galleria..

Each member of the Oregon House and Senate has been issued an Oregon Health Plan patient card and given the medical record of an actual but anonymous Medicaid patient. On May 17, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. legislators will be able to visit an actual doctor at a "clinic" in the galleria. The doctors are medical directors of managed care plans that provide health care for low-income Oregonians..

House Speaker Karen Minnis, R-Wood Village, for example, has the medical record of a 38-year-old woman with emphysema, chest and abdominal pain, a seizure disorder, fungal infections and lower-back pain. Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, has the record of a patient with multiple sclerosis, high blood pressure, an upper respiratory tract infection, low back pain, depression and "diseases of nail."

Minnis, Courtney and every legislator who visits a doctor will learn how the Oregon Health Plan saves the state money and keeps Oregonians healthy through quality, cost-effective health care services, especially for patients with complex medical problems.

"Because Oregon Health Plan patients have access to medical care when they need it, they are more likely to see their doctors and not seek expensive care in the emergency room," said Dr. David Labby, associate medical director of CareOregon, a Portland-based managed care plan that provides health care for about 100,000 Oregon Health Plan members. "We all pay when families do not have insurance and end up in the emergency room. Costs are shifted onto employers and employees in the form of higher insurance premiums."

More than 60,000 people have been dropped from the Oregon Health Plan since February 2004 because of the state's budget crisis. The Legislature is not proposing additional money for the plan in the 2003-05 biennium.

"Our lawmakers are walking away from people who need health care," Labby said. "Our hope is that, by becoming Oregon Health Plan patients for a day they will realize they must make sure more low-income Oregonians are covered by the health plan."

Sponsor of this event is the Coalition for a Healthy Oregon (COHO), an association of 12 independent managed care plans that provide health care to 300,000 Oregon Health Plan members.

Photo Caption: CareOregon's Dr. David Labby talks with Senator Avel Gordley about health care.

