

Woman trying to cure state's ailing health system

BY STEVE BROWN
comment

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Code Blue! This is an emergency!

That pretty much describes the American health care system: Escalating costs associated with even minor procedures; outlandish costs for serious procedures; higher costs of health insurance; a growing population of uninsured; and more and more Americans seeking medical treatment outside the U.S. borders, sometimes at higher medical risk.

If ever there was a system on life support, the American health care system qualifies.

That's how the system looks to Kathleen O'Connor of Seattle, who spent about 30 years as a health care writer and industry analyst. Faced with the conclusion that nothing is being accomplished in terms of health care reform, O'Connor has decided to do something about it.

She fronted \$10,000 of her own money, along with \$5,000 from friend Bill Baldwin, and offered first- and second-place prizes in a Build an American Health Care System contest.

Think of it as one of those "build a better robot" competitions you've seen on cable television.

More than 100 serious plans were submitted by health care professionals from across the nation.

Armed with those plans, O'Connor has launched CodeBlueNow!, a grassroots effort to inspire meaningful change in the health care system.

Her organization has grown to include members in 46 states and active chapters in Oregon and California.

Oregonians will recognize this model by comparing it with the Chalkboard Project, which seeks solutions to the Oregon education system by asking Oregonians what they want from the public education system and how much they're willing to pay to get it.

In the Chalkboard Project's case, this grassroots effort will culminate with a sales pitch to the state legislature.

But in O'Connor's case, her organization has set it's sights a little higher: CodeBlueNow! eventually wants to submit a health care reform plan to Congress and the White House.

Here in Oregon, CodeBlueNow! was awarded a \$160,000 grant by the Northwest Health Foundation in Portland to inspire a public vision and future direction for health care in Oregon.

A questionnaire is being circulated statewide among dozens of organizations, from chamber of commerce members to United Way representatives to civic groups. O'Connor was in Pendleton

late last week, meeting the Oregon Wheat Growers League, gauging its interest in change in the Oregon health care system.

The outcome of the questionnaire will help frame a proposal for meaningful change with how the state manages its health care system.

Is it gonna work? That's the million-dollar question.

But certainly, these grassroots efforts have as much chance as any befuddled debate in the politically charged arena of the Oregon Legislature. Actually, CodeBlueNow! probably has a better shot by pulling in an array of opinions without the clutter of the political landscape.

Assuming all goes well, CodeBlueNow! will help the Northwest Health Foundation in its effort to build a better Oregon medical system.

The best part of this effort is the attitude it brings to the task: "No one is going to fix the health care system for us. Let's do it together."

That's not bad for one woman from Seattle who pulled \$10,000 out of savings and decided to put her money where her mouth is.

East Oregonian Managing Editor Steve Brown is a member of the East Oregonian's editorial board. He can be reached at (800) 522-0255 (Ext. 220) or by e-mail at sbrown@eastoregonian.com.