

Demand rises in medical fields

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SOUTH COAST — The Affordable Care Act has allowed for hundreds more in Coos County to have health insurance.

And, doctors are having trouble keeping up with the demand.

The issue has been discussed at various meetings recently.

“I’ve been seeing about four new patients a day,” said Megan Holland, who has a practice at North Bend Medical Center and works at Southern Coos Hospital and Health Center in Bandon.

Holland mentioned the issue at an open house for the new Bandon Community Health Center, which was able to recruit two new nurse practitioners. They’d likely need more, according to Linda Maxon, executive director for the center.

Holland said she had to schedule patients “weeks and weeks out” because of the influx.

“All areas are recruiting constantly,” Holland said.

But, it’s not enough.

There are about 100 physicians in the county, not including physicians assistants and nurse practitioners, said Phil Greenhill, chief executive officer of Western Oregon Advanced Health, the coordinated care organization for Coos and Curry counties. CCOs provide care for those who have the Oregon Health Plan or Medicaid.

Greenhill said membership in the health program increased from 12,420 on Dec. 31 to 19,200 on March 31.

According to the County Health Rankings website, the ratio of primary care physicians was 1,142-to-1 in 2014. This ratio wasn’t too far off the state’s ratio of 1,115-to-1, but it was still noticeable, according to the Community Health Assessment, which was released last year from the Coos County Public Health Department.

“Provider shortages are felt throughout the county despite some of the data indicating otherwise,” the document said.

A meeting scheduled later this month will address the issue of recruiting more health care workers, Paul Janke, president of Bay Area Hospital, said.

“There is discussion on having methodical recruitment,” Janke said.

Holland thought part of the problem in bringing health care workers to the area was that they often had other family with them, frequently a spouse. If there isn’t a job for the significant

other, it sways a potential candidate's relocation decision, Holland said.

Another issue is funding.

"Some of it is just dollars," Holland said.

Not having the same resources as other communities was a drawback, Holland said.

The Coos County Public Health Department has had an increase of patients who can't see their primary care physician in a timely manner, said Lena Hawtin, clinic supervisor.

Hawtin said more patients were using their services for things such as sexually transmitted diseases or other urgent conditions. She said she'd heard of patients having to wait up to three months to get an appointment. Such a delay in care was detrimental to treatment, she said.

"The clinics in the county are having difficulty recruiting providers," Hawtin said.

Not enough providers for the influx of insured patients was the main reason behind the lag in treatment, Hawtin said. She said the problem was nationwide.

"I don't know that there's enough providers out there (anywhere)," Hawtin said.

The health department conducted one survey during February and March to determine whether patients had health insurance or an assigned provider. Out of 147 who responded, about 38 percent were on the Oregon Health Plan, 40 percent weren't insured and 22 percent had other insurance.

About 44 percent of those with insurance said they had an assigned provider.

Hawtin said they planned to conduct another survey in April and May that would include the question of whether patients were seeing providers in a timely manner.

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