

This appeared in the Winter/Spring 2010 edition of Hospital Voice. To read the entire article in as it appeared in print go to page 18 of this PDF: <http://www.oahhs.org/public-docs/hospital-voice/hospital-voice-february-2010.pdf>

CARE FOR THE SAKE OF CARING

Hospitals provide care without promise of payment

By Shelly Strom

Oregon's 58 community hospitals are the last resort for many of the 639,000 Oregonians who are without health care insurance.

These hospitals are committed to a mission of service rooted within the communities they serve.

"There's a reason you have the blue H signs on the highway. Those really are important to people," said Ellen Lowe, community advocate for the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems (OAHHS). "Hospitals, however, are more than just the ER and the maternity ward. Sharing the story around 'the rest' of what hospitals do provides an opportunity for hospitals to connect with a wider community."

The notion of hospitals benefiting the communities where they operate is as old as the institutions themselves. "Mother Joseph provides a fine example of community service," said Julie Trocchio, senior director of community benefit and continuing care for the Catholic Health Association.

In 1854, Joseph led a group of five Sisters of Providence from Quebec to Vancouver, WA. There they built House of Providence, which served as an orphanage and now is an office building known as The Academy. Providence Health & Services is an outgrowth of the women's endeavors throughout the Pacific Northwest. "Community benefit is part and parcel to the reason hospitals exist," said Kari Stanley, director of community benefit at Legacy Health. "Our mission is to care for everyone, both those with insurance and those without."

Dollar amounts tied to uncompensated care and services — known as "community benefit" — have risen astronomically in recent years. In 2009 hospitals delivered an estimated \$1 billion in care and services that qualify as community benefit. Ten years ago, Oregon hospitals provided a little more than \$150 million in care and services in the category of community benefit. Such growth is largely attributable to providing services to people without health insurance. As communities and the needs of people within them have expanded, so have the services hospitals provide through a variety of programs.

Examples of charity care and other programs designed to benefit the community abound. The array of free offerings include: flu shots, car seat installation clinics, prenatal and general medical care, classroom lessons in health, lectures on managing chronic disease, librarians who can research for medically valid information, health fairs, transportation to and from medical appointments, and more.