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Food Rx

Healthy food for a healthier community

Portland—For Janet Stobie, the debut of CareOregon's Food Rx was a wonderful surprise. CareOregon's pilot project, in partnership with My Street Grocery and three local clinics, tests the idea that giving prescriptions for food to people like Janet can support their health care regime.

Many Oregonians either don't get enough food or don't have access to fresh produce and other healthy food items in their neighborhoods or at prices they can afford.

As part of CareOregon's test, Stobie's doctor wrote her a prescription for \$15 in healthy food to be used at the My Street Grocery trolley parked at Oregon Health & Science University Family Medicine at Richmond.

"It was a lot more than I thought," Stobie says. "I thought it would be just, like, produce, and that was it. But they had a lot of canned goods in there, and other kinds of groceries that are healthy for you."

Diabetes runs in Stobie's family, so she worries about good nutrition. And even when good, healthy food is available in her community, there is always the cost to consider on a limited income.

Why Food Prescriptions

CareOregon partners with four of the regional Coordinated Care Organizations (CCOs) to serve more than 200,000 Oregon Health Plan (Medicaid) members in the state, and is testing a variety of innovative programs that take health concerns outside the exam room.

CareOregon and CCOs are charged with looking beyond health care to healthy communities. As a community-benefit non-profit, CareOregon's mission is to promote the health of the community, regardless of health plan membership status.

Promoting access to healthy food is a part of that, said Tom Wunderlich, a manager in the public policy department at CareOregon.

"We know that providers only see people in clinics, but a lot of 'health' happens outside of clinics," Wunderlich says. "This is an opportunity for providers to help keep their patients healthy outside of the clinic setting."

The Food Rx pilot helps the dialogue between patient and provider about healthy food.

"These dialogues happen already and there is a bit of education," he says. "But having the access right when you walk out of the clinic really reinforces the idea in the patient's mind that this matters. This matters to my doctor, this matters to my health."

Safety net clinics as partners

Patients with limited income often struggle because health depends more on what happens outside the clinic than on anything the doctor or nurse can do or prescribe.

"We really need to be bringing attention to the <u>health</u> part of health care," says Rachael Postman, R.N., F.N.P. During her six years at OHSU Family Medicine at Richmond, Postman has taught patients about the dietary and other lifestyle changes needed to manage obesity, diabetes and other chronic conditions.

"What I was hearing was that people were really struggling to have access to fresh, healthy vegetables, knowing what to do with fresh, healthy vegetables," she says.

For a couple of years, Richmond has hosted farm sales in the parking lot. The partnership with My Street Grocery is another step. While CareOregon's pilot will only run six weeks at three clinics, the hope is that patients will continue to shop for healthy food at My Street Grocery or elsewhere. And CareOregon hopes that the pilot might lead to a partnership with other safety net organizations to keep the food prescription idea going.

"I'm excited," Postman said. "I'm excited that we can offer low-income patients an opportunity to get some healthy food choices."

Over the next six weeks, in addition to OHSU Family Medicine at Richmond, doctors at Multnomah County Health Department's Rockwood Community Health Center and Central City Concern's Old Town Clinic will choose select patients to offer food prescriptions. The patients will receive three \$15 vouchers over the six week period.

Whole Foods as partner

CareOregon chose to work with Amelia Pape, who created My Street Grocery because of her unique approach. She not only sourced healthy and organic food, she provides shoppers with advice on how to prepare and combine foods.

She started My Street Grocery as a graduate student, "It was great in the sense that the community really adopted it and I think there was a real need for it," Pape said.

"But now I have joined Whole Foods Markets and My Street Grocery has become a program of the Pacific Northwest Region of Whole Foods. That means we have the same mission focus, but we have the power of Whole Foods Markets behind us, we can operate year-round, we have a far more full variety of options."

What's next

- The Food Rx and My Street Grocery pilot will host a grand opening and Whole Foods "BreakingBread" ceremony at 10 a.m. Wednesday, May 28, at OHSU Family Medicine at Richmond. (Media: Please contact Tamara Hargens-Bradley, 503-494-8231; hargenst@ohsu.edu if you plan to attend.) On Fridays, it will be at Multnomah County's Rockwood Community Health Center from 11 to 2, and Old Town Clinic from 3 to 6.
- CareOregon's Food Rx program is a six-week pilot project. Providers at each of the three clinics are
 setting their own criteria for determining who to give the food vouchers. At the end of the pilot, the
 CareOregon team will evaluate the results, considering what impact there was on the health and
 wellness of the recipients and the benefit to the clinics. Other community organizations have
 expressed interest in addressing the issue of access to healthy foods, Wunderlich said. CareOregon
 will continue to look to these organizations for opportunities to extend the project.

For more information or to arrange an interview, contact Jeanie Lunsford.

CareOregon is a non-profit organization providing health plan services to Coordinated Care Organizations, Oregon's Health CO-OP and Medicare Advantage organizations, and offering quality improvement training to health care professionals in the United States and beyond. Its mission is to help improve health and well-being across the communities it serves. For more information, see careoregon.org.