

**Wallowa Memorial Hospital
Community Health Needs Assessment
Summary Report April 2013**



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Wallowa Memorial Hospital Community Health Needs Assessment Report April 2013

Introduction

WMH includes a 25-bed Critical Access Hospital (CAH), a long-term care facility, a Swing Bed program, Respite Program, and Cardiopulmonary Services, and emergency medical services. The primary service area for Wallowa Memorial Hospital is Wallowa County, located in the northeast corner of Oregon along the Washington and Idaho borders. The county is mostly mountainous and forms the headwaters for several important tributaries to the Columbia/Snake River System. The county comprises 3,153 square miles with four incorporated cities and several small unincorporated areas. It has a population of 7,008 with a population density of 2.2 persons per square mile.

This rural setting, while beautiful and scenic, imparts physical barriers to providing healthcare. Wallowa Memorial Hospital is the only hospital in Wallowa County. The next closest community hospital is in La Grande, Oregon, which requires 1 hour and 45 minutes of driving time and travel on mountainous roads. Most hospital transfers are by fixed-wing aircraft to Portland, Oregon, Spokane, Washington, or Boise, Idaho.

According to the latest economic data, the county unemployment rate in December 2011 was 10.2% and in December 2012 was 9.9%. The average pay per job in 2010 was \$29,617, while the state average was \$43,051. The last census indicated 15% of county residents had income below Federal Poverty Level. The last population review for age of population in July 2011 indicated 19.2% were 17 and under, 24.1% were 65 and over, with the remaining 18-64 comprising 56.7%. Oregon Department of Human Services Budget 2009-2011 Impact to Communities report identifies the following statistics: 1,329 people served by DHS; 800 received food stamps; 774 enrolled in the Oregon Health Plan; 80 received assistance for needy families; 76 received long-term care for seniors and people with physical disabilities; 239 enrolled for mental health and addictions services; and 88 “others” such as vocational rehabilitation, developmental disabilities, and child welfare.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for implementing each component of the health care needs assessment is summarized below.

Community Survey

Wallowa Memorial Hospital is a partner with the Northeast Oregon Network (NEON), a community health collaborative working in the three rural Northeastern counties of Oregon of Baker, Union, and Wallowa. NEON's mission is to increase access to integrated healthcare for northeast Oregon residents by identifying system gaps, facilitating community-developed solutions, and advocating for health policy change. This partnership provides Wallowa Memorial Hospital with coordinated data collection and analysis capabilities.

Wallowa Memorial Hospital also assesses County's the health care needs of the county through several formal and informal processes. The hospital conducts a memorial walk / race in June and sponsors a health fair booth during the event. At the booth, health information is provided and interests and ideas are collected concerning individual health needs. Several hospital staff members participate in other human services delivery systems as board members participants in activities, or as volunteers. Those serving as board members have the capacity to bring needs and concerns indentified by those outside organization directly to the hospital's executive committee for consideration.

The hospital works directly with agencies in the county such as the Health Department, Commission on Children & Families, Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness (mental health), and Community Connections of Wallowa County (senior services, children, low-income persons, and persons with disabilities) to assist in developing comprehensive services for disadvantaged clients. Through these collaborative processes Wallowa Memorial Hospital is able to identify potential needs.

Secondary Data

The information collected for the secondary data analysis was obtained from the Oregon Office of Rural Health (ORH). ORH's mission is to improve the quality, availability, and accessibility of health care for rural Oregonians. The Office partnered with Oregon Health & Science University in 1989 to increase its ability to bring statewide resources to rural areas. The office engages in four principal activities:

- **Planning, Policy Development and Advocacy** - The state legislature has charged the office with “coordinating” the provision of health care to rural Oregonians and developing legislative proposals to benefit the health of rural Oregonians.
- **Information Clearinghouse** - The office operates an information clearinghouse, which provides rural health information to health care

providers, elected officials and government agencies, educators and members of the public.

- **Provider Recruitment and Retention** - Our Provider Recruitment and Retention Services help rural communities recruit and retain primary care providers.
- **Technical Assistance to Communities** - The office offers assistance to rural communities, often on-site, to strengthen their health care delivery systems.

Socio-Demographics of the Service Area

In order to assess the health care needs of the service area population, it is important to identify significant socio-demographic factors of the population that impact the need for health care services. These factors are summarized below.

- The population for the service area is 7,008, with the highest concentration of the population in 4 cities along highway Oregon State 82 – Enterprise 1934, Joseph 1079, Wallowa 807, and Lostine 213.
- The majority of the population in the service area is Caucasian, with less than 5% of the population categorized as non-white.
- The service area has a higher elderly population compared to the state.
- The poverty level of families with children (200% of Federal Poverty Level), “the working poor”, is 33.9%.
- Percentage of those receiving Social Security pension is 39.2%.
- The percent of people without health insurance in Wallowa County is 22.6%
- The percentage of people without dental insurance in Wallowa County is 53%.

In summary, although the population of the service area is under 8,000, there is a high percent of elderly. Demand for health care services, specifically geriatric orientated services is significant for this older population.

The large uninsured and low-income populations also impact the demand for health care. These populations tend to present for acute health care problems as opposed to participating in preventative health care opportunities.

Health Status in the Service Area

In addition to socio-demographic factors, disparities in health status for the service area population also provide an indication of health care needs. These disparities are summarized below.

Wallowa County average death per 1,000 population was 10.7 compared to the state of 8.2. The leading causes of death in Wallowa County include disease of the heart, cancer, and chronic lower respiratory disease.

Chronic disease key health care findings from the NEON needs assessment are:

- Asthma for Oregon Health Plan (OHP) participants and the uninsured
- COPD/Lower Respiratory Disease
- Mental health
- Oral Health Disease
- Substance Abuse

Specific social determinants of health as assessed on the NEON Community Needs Assessment Survey are:

- Not having enough money to pay for housing
- Not having enough money to pay for medical insurance
- Not having enough money to pay for a doctor
- Not having enough money to pay for a dentist
- Not being able to get help when stressed, depressed, or anxious, (OHP population)
- Children in poverty
- Adults 200% of FPL and under

Other identified social determinants are;

- Not enough money for food
- Not enough money for utilities
- Not enough money for prescriptions
- Health literacy: not being able to read or understand condition specific information well enough

These findings imply that there are multiple factors which impact the healthcare needs of Wallowa County residents. Simply adding services for those identified items will not address nor solve the health care needs. A robust cross-agency effort must be

orchestrated to successfully tackle the demonstrated needs. When agencies servicing these populations can agree upon a common vision for providing a comprehensive approach, then these populations will have greater chance for improvement. Wallowa Memorial Hospital can play a significant role in bringing county agencies and healthcare delivery organizations together. The recent initiative for the Coordinated Care Organization (CCO) development in Oregon is potentially the framework in which to pull this effort together.

Health Care Gaps or Needs in the Community

A synthesis of the results from the needs assessment pointed to three health care needs and one social determinant that should be explored further and addressed. The four needs/determinants are:

- Access to primary care services
- Access to mental health services
- Access to dental health services
- Public transportation

These needs are described more fully below, along with conclusions and recommendations for addressing them.

Access to Primary Care Services

Results of the community survey and analysis of the secondary data indicate a lack of access to or use of primary care services.

- Wallowa Memorial Hospital's Emergency Room has been utilized by many in the county as their Primary Care source.
- There are four unaffiliated Primary Care clinics in Wallowa County: Winding Waters Clinic with four Family Practice physicians and one nurse practitioner; Wallowa Mountain Medical with three Family Practice physicians and one part-time nurse practitioner; one solo Family Practice physician practice; and one solo nurse practitioner clinic. These clinics rely on the hospital for radiology, laboratory and physical therapy support.
- Wallowa County is designated as a Health Professional Shortage Areas for primary care.
- Many of the health status disparities can be mitigated with routine primary and preventive care.

- One clinic, Winding Waters Clinic, in conjunction with Wallowa Memorial Hospital, has in the last year expanded their hours of operations to include evening hours and weekends. This clinic provides opportunities for individuals seeking urgent/routine primary care level care who cannot miss work or who experience healthcare issues on the weekend. This effort has reduced the hospital's emergency room utilization for acute primary care visits. Thus enabling the hospital ER to focus on those patients seeking care for truly emergent care.

Conclusions/Recommendations

Access to primary care is an issue that Wallowa Memorial Hospital should examine further, particularly for the low-income population. This issue should be explored with regard to the other multi-physician Primary Care Clinics in the county. The solo practices PCCs realistically are not positioned to expand their hours of operation. However, encouragement and support for possible expansion should be explored.

Access to Mental Health Services

As with primary care, Wallowa Memorial Hospital's emergency room is utilized by many in the county as their immediate portal for mental health services, regardless of the severity of illness at the time.

Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness is Wallowa County's one agency for mental health services. The public schools provide limited capabilities to support children with mental health issues and rely on the Center for Wellness to provide in-depth support for the individual child and/or the family.

The NEON identified population seeking mental health services indicated in the survey results that transportation is a major factor in their ability to access timely mental health services, and only when their situation becomes critical do they seek assistance. The lack of early intervention through normal primary care processes delays treatment and escalates their condition.

- One clinic, Winding Waters Clinic, in conjunction with the Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness, in the last year incorporated a shared practice model. When the Winding Waters Clinic located their office space in the new Medical Office Building, the Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness co-located a team of behavioral specialists to provide a wrap-around care envelope for those clients identified as potentially benefiting from a referral. This cooperative effort has proven very successful.
- Additionally, the Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness leased office space in the new Medical Office Building which has provided a second location for clients to access their services. To further reduce barriers for the Center's clients, the two clinics share the same "check-in" reception process so there isn't a perceived stigmatism of having to check-in with a mental health receptionist.

- The Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness has embarked on a program as part of the Coordinated Care Organization initiative in Oregon to address the 13 CCO Incentive Measures, of which five are directly related to mental health issues. These measures address many of the mental health concerns identified in the NEON survey. This initiative is in its infancy, but expectations are for improvements to reduce the identified gaps or reach certain thresholds by 2014 in order to qualify for fully targeted funding for that measure.

The five areas of concentration are:

- Alcohol and drug misuse, screening, brief intervention and referral for treatment
- Follow up after hospitalization for mental illness
- Screening for clinical depression and follow-up plan
- Mental and physical health assessment within 60 days for children in DHS custody
- Follow up care for children prescribed ADHD medication

Conclusions/Recommendations

Access to mental health services is an issue that Wallowa Memorial Hospital should examine further, particularly for the low-income population. While Wallowa Memorial Hospital doesn't provide these services directly, it has a supporting role since it provides hospital care for individuals who are unable to be maintained in the community, and those awaiting admission to a psychiatric facility. As with access to Primary Care Clinics this issue is in early exploration with regards to the other multi-physician Primary Care Clinics in the county. The solo practices PCCs realistically are not positioned to expand their hours of operation. However, encouragement and support for possible expansion should be explored.

Access to Dental Health Services

In the survey nearly 40% of Wallowa County respondents to the NEON Survey indicated that it had been over 2 years since their last visit to a dentist or dental clinic. Of that 40%, 10% responded with a more than 5 years since their last visit to a dentist or dental clinic.

- There are three solo dentists practicing dentistry in their clinics in Wallowa County; one in Joseph and two are in Enterprise. There are varying practices among them as to seeing patients without dental insurance, and there are only a small number of appointments available for charity care.

- The emergency room at Wallowa Memorial Hospital is the safety net for these citizens. Many of these individuals are also without health insurance and a visit to the hospital ER is the last resort and often with severe pain and or an abscess.
- Wallowa County is without access to a dental training clinic with reduced fee schedule like the ODS Clinic in La Grande, OR (78 miles away). Since many individuals without dental coverage forego regular dental hygiene visits, regular transportation to the ODS clinic could potentially help alleviate this situation. Affordable public transportation is a challenge

Each Wallowa County dentist and their clinic are supportive of providing dental care for those experiencing emergency dental needs. As with primary care, the driving issue is providing preventive dental care and teaching for routine matters.

Conclusions/Recommendations

Access to dental services is an issue that Wallowa Memorial Hospital should explore further, particularly for the low-income population. While Wallowa Memorial Hospital doesn't provide dental services directly, it has a supporting role in that it provides hospital care for individuals who access the emergency room in pain or with serious infection. These emergency room visits are expensive, usually preventable with early dental intervention, and require a great deal more resources to fix than to prevent. A collaborative effort among the agencies that provide assistance to low income families and the healthcare community (all disciplines) is one identified method of obtaining an understanding of the magnitude and potential solutions. Wallowa Memorial Hospital is once again the stop gap response to these dental issues within the context of populations with limited resources via the emergency room. The added poor understanding of the individual's ability to help themselves, through proper dental hygiene and personal practices compounds the dilemma. The newly forming Coordinating Care Organization may become the forum to begin to develop "wrap around services" for all healthcare issues and Wallowa Memorial Hospital should be a key participant.

Public Transportation

Lack of public transportation was identified as a barrier for access to health care in all regions surveyed. The lack of public transportation impacts the quality of life for rural populations due to distances between all points-of-service not just healthcare. Two distinct populations are at a greater disadvantage when public transportation is lacking: low-income individuals and families who are less likely to have private transportation options and seniors who are unable to drive themselves. Lack of flexible transportation was considered by many to impact their ability to react to changing healthcare appointments or last minute needs.

- Community Connections, a Wallowa County program provides a commuter bus service for the four cities along Highway 82, the main highway through the county. This service operates Monday through Thursday, 8am to Noon and 1pm to 5 pm. Community Connections also operates two other bus services. The Tuesday bus provides door to door service for a small fee for those four cities. The other is directed towards seniors and disabled and provides transportation for medical appointments. The client is asked to pay either \$7.50 for local addresses (e.g. around Enterprise) and \$15 for distant locations in the county (e.g. Flora pr Imnaha). Community Connections also transports those with Medicaid insurance that have medical transportation as a recognized benefit.
- The services provided by Community Connections are valuable asset for Wallowa County for those at risk populations. However, there is a significant population which doesn't qualify for those assisted programs or who live in areas outside of the population centers.

Conclusions/Recommendations

The task of providing transportation to a dispersed population seeking healthcare is quite large. A coalition of all agencies who provide services and or assistance to these populations (e.g. Community Connections, Building Health Families, Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness, and Commission on Children and Families) could explore option and solutions such as a volunteer corps to provide transportation.

Health care gaps or needs in Wallowa County, as identified by the survey, are long standing perceptions. The Community Health Needs Assessment validates these perceptions and provides a picture of the numbers and description of the population who are without adequate and timely health care. The factors are numerous and often entangled with provider entities bounded by rigid regulatory and financial fences. Improvement and success in changing this environment of silos will require all agencies local and state to be engaged in this effort. Each facet of health care delivery is up for scrutiny and change if Wallowa County is to provide basic health care. Wallowa Memorial Hospital is a key player in this effort through its leadership and a partner in the delivery of health care to Wallowa County.