

Nurse practitioners helping cure physician shortage

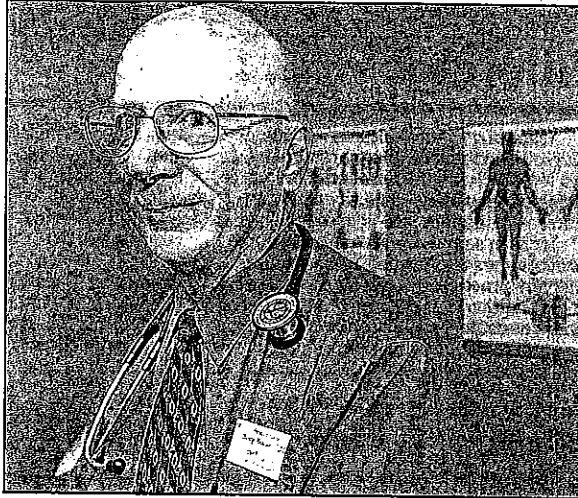
By Linsay Olesak
of the Daily Courier

When Roger Fogg sees new patients, some are hesitant and a little unsure. But over time, the vast majority come to think of Fogg as their "doctor."

The nurse practitioner has run Applegate Family Medicine in Murphy for about six years. He has around 4,000 patients in his database.

Fogg believes nurse practitioners are stepping in to fill the void created by a shortage of primary care physicians, often referred to as "family doctors," in Grants Pass and elsewhere. Over the next decade, federal health care reforms will result in insurance for an estimated 11,000 Josephine County residents who are currently uninsured, exacerbating the shortage.

With many difficulties in recruiting primary care physicians to the area, such as lower Medicare and Medicaid reim-



TIMOTHY BULLARD/Daily Courier

Roger Fogg, a nurse practitioner, has run Applegate Family Medicine in Murphy for about six years. Fogg feels that nurse practitioners are stepping in to fill the primary care physician shortage in Grants Pass.

bursements, nurse practitioners have stepped in to fill the gap.

The term "nurse practitioner" might not be familiar to everyone, but nurse practitioners have been licensed to provide care out of their offices for more than 30 years in Oregon.

"Physician's assistants and nurse practitioners are not doctors. They are what we call mid-level providers," said Lyle Jackson, medical director at the Mid Rogue Independent Physicians Association in Grants Pass. "They provide a very important place in delivering medical care in our community, because if we didn't have them we'd be very short of providers."

Nurse practitioners are registered nurses with advanced clinical training, Fogg explained. They can provide primary health care in adult, family, geriatric, neonatal, pediatric and women's medicine. According to the Oregon State Board of Nursing, board-certified nurse

practitioners can run their own offices, or work with physicians who can then serve more patients.

"We do just about everything a physician would do," said Fogg, who also treats dementia patients two days a week at six memory care centers in Grants Pass. "We do diagnosing, ordering labs, X-rays, interpreting data and prescribing therapy. We also do minor procedures in the office that a physician would also do, such as removing skin lesions, treating with liquid nitrogen, suturing victims of accidents."

Some doctors might be able to perform procedures such as a colonoscopy or an upper endoscopy, while a nurse practitioner would refer the patient to a specialist, Fogg said.

"We refer patients to specialists all the time, just as a physician would in their office," Fogg said.

Turn to SHORTAGE, Page 2A

Shortage From Page 1A

According to the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners, there are about 140,000 certified nurse practitioners practicing nationwide, and nearly 8,000 new nurse practitioners are licensed each year.

Jackson said there are about 30 nurse practitioners and around 100 doctors actively practicing in the MRIPA network.

In addition to nurse practitioners, physician's assistants also play a role in serving a growing number of patients. According to

the Oregon State Board of Nursing, physician's assistants are required to work under the supervision of a physician. Many physician's assistants can provide about 80 percent of the services typically provided by a family physician.

Those services include physical exams, diagnosing illnesses, developing and carrying out treatment plans; ordering and interpreting lab tests, suturing wounds, assisting in surgery and providing preven-

tive health care counseling.

"Siskiyou Community Health employs physician's assistants who do a good job treating patients," Jackson said. "There's a value and place for nurse practitioners and physician's assistants practicing in Grants Pass because they do provide a critical role in delivering care."

□ □ □

Reach reporter Linsay Olesak at 541-474-3722 or lolesak@thedailycourier.com