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Idaho health-care realities

Panel addresses issues; Petersen reflects on son's cancer

NAMPA — Health care — and how to afford it — is an issue that hits close to home for many Idahoans.

At a Tuesday morning forum, a panel of local health care professionals addressed the public's questions on the important topic. Boise State's head football coach Chris Petersen also spoke about his personal health care experience, reflecting on his son's battle with cancer.

Petersen's experience

Petersen told the audience that his youngest son, Sam, was diagnosed with brain cancer when he was just 13 months old. The coach said that after an eight-hour surgery to remove the tumor, doctors realized that the cancer had already spread into Sam's spine. His son then had to endure around two years of chemotherapy and other treatments. "It was the toughest, the hardest, most agonizing thing we've ever been through," Petersen said. He said someone asked him at the time how the family would pay for the care and he replied: "It doesn't matter."



Joe Messmer, CEO of Mercy Medical Center in Nampa, speaks about how much money from the stimulus package will be spent on health care during the forum at the Nampa Civic Center.

"You just do whatever you have to do," he said.

But Petersen said the health care system worked for his family — they had good insurance and a good support system. He was able to take time off from work without losing his job, maintaining his insurance coverage.

Sam, now 10 years old, is "doing awesome," Petersen said, although he has some loss of hearing and must go through yearly MRIs that will most likely continue his entire life.

Panelist comments

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Ed Dahlberg, CEO of St. Luke's Health System, who sat on Tuesday's panel, said there are many good parts to the American health care system. The system has evolved over time, shaped by culture, Dahlberg said, so it is important for the public to stay engaged in solving health-care concerns.

Health care problems are often linked to culture.

Dr. Doug Dammrose said 70 percent of healthcare costs are the result of behaviors such as smoking and obesity, a factor that must be addressed, he said.

John McGee, an Idaho senator and director of marketing for Caldwell's West Valley Medical Center, said the government must set a different framework for health-care policy.

"Everyone in this room understands that we have a problem," McGee said.

The public raised questions about how the recently approved national stimulus package will affect health care.

Joe Messmer, CEO of Nampa's Mercy Medical Center, listed various dollar amounts that will go to different areas of health care, including \$17 billion for health technology. Messmer said the health technology money is controversial, though, because of disagreement about whether computerized methods make health care more efficient.