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## Plug in

Your connection to community events through Monday

### SATURDAY

#### Community

- ◆ **Fathappy:** 6 p.m., Mission Ridge Ski Area, 663-6543
- ◆ **The Blakes, Ariadne, Grunge Renaissance:** Punk, 7 p.m., Beacon Hill Grange Hall, 323 Easy St., Wenatchee, 669-5112
- ◆ **Terry Hunt and Lynette Westendorf:** Winter Jazz at the Merc Festival, 7 p.m., Merc Playhouse, Twisp, 996-3418

### MONDAY

#### Government

- ◆ **Douglas County Commission:** 8:30 a.m., courthouse, Waterville, 745-8537
- ◆ **Okanogan County Commission:** 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., 123 Fifth Ave., Okanogan, 422-7100
- ◆ **Chelan County Commission:** 9 a.m., courthouse, 667-6215
- ◆ **Grant County PUD:** 9 a.m., 30 C St. S.W., Ephrata, 754-0500
- ◆ **Chelan County PUD:** 1 p.m., 327 N. Wenatchee Ave., 663-8121
- ◆ **Douglas County PUD:** 2 p.m., 1151 Valley Mall Parkway, East Wenatchee, 884-7191
- ◆ **Chelan-Douglas Regional Support Network Board:** 4 p.m., Douglas County Service Building, 140 19th St. N.W., East Wenatchee, 886-6318
- ◆ **Cashmere Planning Committee:** 5 p.m., City Hall, 782-3513
- ◆ **Omak City Council:** 7 p.m., City Hall, 826-1170
- ◆ **Waterville City Council:** 7:30 p.m., City Hall, 745-8871

#### Schools

- ◆ **Cashmere School Board:** 6:30 a.m., district office, 782-3355

### ◆ READER REP

## Have a question about the paper or community?

Contact our reader representative. This week it's reporter Rob Ollikainen.

If the question is of broader interest, our representative may write about it on this page in

# Health Buddy is a friend indeed for the ill in need

BY K.C. MEHAFFEY  
World staff writer

EAST WENATCHEE — To Perryann Azevedo, the Health Buddy is aptly named.

The lunchbox-sized computer that has sat on her bedside table for the last two months is like a security blanket; it's an extra set of eyes watching for complications that could arise from her diabetes.

It wears a hat to keep the light from bothering her at night. And she calls the gadget "she" because Lori Smet, a nurse case manager at Wenatchee Valley Medical Center, checks her answers to a dozen questions the Health Buddy asks her every day.

Azevedo said it's become a comfort to her, and would be even more important if she were still living alone, which she did in California for 15 years before her kids convinced her six years ago to move in with her son and his family in East Wenatchee.

"It's gotten to be like another person. There's somebody else I can depend on, whether I need it or not," she said.

Azevedo is one of 20 diabetics who tested the new program.

On Wednesday, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services sent letters to hundreds of people in the Bend, Ore., area, and to Wenatchee Valley Medical Center patients in Wenatchee, Omak and Moses Lake, asking them if they want to participate.

The program is expected to cut the high cost of treating chronic illnesses through daily monitoring. The idea is that doctors will discover a complication before it becomes serious, and their patients will be treated at a clinic, instead of waiting until they require a more costly hospital stay.

To be eligible, patients must be on Medicare and have one of three chronic illnesses: diabetes, congestive heart failure, or COPD — chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

The program will be paid for by Medicare, clinics in Wenatchee and Bend, and Health Hero, the Redwood City, Calif., company that developed the Health Buddy.

Steve Brown, Health Hero's president and CEO, is a 1983 Wenatchee High School graduate, and the son of Dr. Jim Brown, former chairman and CEO of the Wenatchee Valley Medical Center.

Brown's technology has already been shown to reduce hospitalizations by up to 63 percent in similar programs, the company's Web site says.

Smet, a nurse for 15 years before being hired by the clinic last year to oversee the Health Buddy program, said participation is completely voluntary.

In the next few months, she's hoping to get 965 people connected to the clinic through a Health Buddy. The only thing they need is a phone line and a willingness to answer a series of simple questions each day about their illness, and how they're managing it.

The computer urges them to call Smet or their doctor if their answers to certain questions warrant.

And in case they don't, Smet, whose computer automatically receives their answers, will call them the next day.

Smet said in just a couple of months, and with only 20 patients on the program, the monitoring has already convinced a couple of people to visit the clinic to get their feet checked. They ended up with infections, and got a round of antibiotics, she said.

Foot problems are common among people with diabetes, and can lead to much more serious problems including amputation, she said.

She said some of her patients have told her that they don't want to bother their doctor with a question, but they don't mind calling her.

Azevedo said she has seen her blood sugar go so low she passed out, so she knows she has to keep track of it. She was already taking her blood sugar readings five times a day, but the Health Buddy provides an extra level of comfort, Azevedo said.

"I think the reason so many people (with diabetes) have depression is they feel there's nobody out there," she said. "With this, you know there's a whole team of people out there. And they're not going to say, 'Oh that's stupid. Why did you call?'"

A teacher at junior high and



World photo/Kelly Gillin

Perryann Azevedo, East Wenatchee, uses the Health Buddy at her home to help monitor her diabetes and any possible complications that could result from her condition. Azevedo, a former school teacher from California, is one of 20 local diabetics who helped test a new program that tracks their health on a daily basis using information generated from questions they answer on the Health Buddy.

high schools in California for 30 years, Azevedo tunes right in to answering the multiple choice questions asked by her Health Buddy.

She doesn't like having to record a bad blood sugar reading. "I always feel like I haven't done something right. Maybe I ate more carbs for my breakfast than I should have, or I didn't take the proper amount of insulin," she said.

But she likes the little quiz at the end, with new questions every day that test her understanding of diabetes.

"That is correct!" she read

**"I think the reason so many people (with diabetes) have depression is they feel there's nobody out there. With this, you know there's a whole team of people out there."**

**PERRYANN AZEVEDO**  
Diabetes patient

aloud from the monitor after answering one question. "It always gives you instant gratification if you're right."

And to add a bit of fun, it ends with a trivia question or statement, "Just to see if you're on your toes," she said.