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Photo taken by Adam Urquhart

Officials ask for help with health care

By ADAM URQUHART
Staff Writer

NASHUA – During National Health Center Week, U.S. Sen. Maggie Hassan, D-N.H., stopped by Lamprey Health Care to discuss prescription drug pricing and health care costs, while also learning about the InteGreat Health partnership.

While there are many facets of health care that need more attention, InteGreat Health is committed to treating both the mind and body by making it easier to receive physical and mental care. The partnership launched about a year ago in 2018, and is a collaborative effort between Lamprey and Greater Nashua Mental Health Center (GNMHC). InteGreat is designed to make primary care and behavioral health services more accessible.

In the meantime, however, there are a number of issues facing the health care sector from reimbursement rates to a statewide health care workforce shortage.

“Despite the fact that the U.S. is one of the wealthiest nations in the world, we have one in 10 persons without any health insurance, and many more with inadequate health insurance to meet their needs, which causes people to either delay treatment or actually forgo treatment all together,” GNMHC President and CEO Craig Amoth said during the roundtable discussion.

Additionally, he said one in five people in the U.S. has a diagnosable mental illness, yet only a small fraction receive services. Amoth said that relates to the lack of adequate insurance, but also stigma. This can also result in what’s being seen not just in New Hampshire, but across the country in terms of the opioid crisis and substance use disorder. He said that New Hampshire ranks fourth in the nation for the number of opioid deaths per capita.

“New Hampshire’s suicide rate has increased by nearly 50% in the last 17 years,” Amoth said. He

said it is the second leading cause of death for those in the 18-34 age range.

Moreover, other issues he highlighted include the lack of psychiatric beds and intensive community based options. Amoth said state officials recently assembled a 10-year plan to address the critical behavioral health care needs in the state. That the plan was partially addressed in the budget, but that budget was vetoed by Gov. Chris Sununu, meaning those much needed funds are unavailable.

“We have to get a budget passed that funds the 10-year mental health plan because in that 10-year mental health plan, there was actually resources for additional psychiatric beds, additional intensive community based options, Medicaid rate increase. And why is that important? Because Medicaid funds 75% of all the services the community mental health centers provide in the state,” Amoth said.

He said New Hampshire has one of the lowest rates of reimbursement throughout the nation. That low rate of reimbursement is also contributing to the workforce shortage that’s currently impacting each corner of the state.

Hassan sat at the head of the table and provided those health care professionals seated before her with an update on bipartisan steps that are being taken in relation to health care. One of them relates to the cost of prescription drugs.

“I hear far too often from people across the state that skyrocketing prescription drug costs are untenable,” Hassan said.

Recently, she helped pass the Prescription Drug Pricing Reduction Act out of the Senate Finance Committee, and spoke about it during Monday’s roundtable. This piece of legislation would impose a cap on out-of-pocket prescription drug costs for Medicare Part D beneficiaries, while cracking down on pharmaceutical companies that raise drug prices higher than the rate of inflation.

She said it will cap those out-of-

pocket costs for seniors on Medicare to \$3,100. So, once a senior gets passed that \$3,100 mark, the government had been picking up 80 percent of so of the catastrophic amount. She said this now has Big Pharma and insurers paying, while the government is only responsible for 20%.

“We think that that gives pharma and insurers some incentives here on keeping costs down,” Hassan said.

It would also penalize pharmaceutical companies that raise their prices faster than the rate of inflation, while also penalizing drug companies if prices go beyond inflation. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office found that over 10 years, the legislation could save taxpayers \$85 billion in Medicare spending.

“The fact that essentially there was a bipartisan willingness to take Big Pharma on is a really important step forward for us and for the people you all serve,” Hassan said to those seated before her.

Lamprey Communications and Marketing Manager Michelle Gaudet said it has been very difficult in the current environment with a very low unemployment rate because there are not a lot of people looking for work. Therefore, they are trying to recruit people to come to the state.

“There are a lot of initiatives that we’re working really hard on, like the opioid issues, and we have a lot of resources coming into the state, a lot of grant money, the hub-and-spoke model. It’s all good stuff, but if you don’t have the clinicians that can see the patients and provide that care, you can’t put that money to work,” Gaudet said.

Moreover, officials said New Hampshire’s Medicaid reimbursement rates are lower than surrounding states, which means professionals can go to Massachusetts to earn higher salaries.

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Turgiss

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Shortly thereafter, Donchess informed The Telegraph the city had hired Manchester-based attorney Mark Broth of Drummond Woodsum to investigate regarding Turgiss.

With the outside counsel’s investigation having been initiated around the second week of May, there has been no update from either the city or Broth regarding any progress made.

“All inquiries regarding the investigation should be directed to the city,” Broth said last Tuesday through an email exchange. “I do not intend to comment on, or otherwise provide information regarding the investigation.”

Meanwhile, officials at City Hall have either continued to decline to comment on the issue or instead defer to other points of contact, including the city’s Corporation Counsel Steve Bolton, who said he is not the contact for the investigation.

Nashua Administrative Services Director Kim Kleiner, who now oversees the Assessing Department, has also declined any inquiries involving Turgiss and the ongoing investigation. “You know I can’t comment on that,” Kleiner said on Friday. “It’s a personnel issue.”

While there has been no update, Ortolano – who has been vocal in her crusade

to generate change within the department – on Monday expressed disappointment regarding the city’s refusal to comment.

“They’re being very quiet and they’re not giving any feedback, and it just doesn’t seem that things are quite right up there,” she said. “I’m just really disappointed. It is amazing to me that they haven’t figured out what is going on.”

As word from the city on Broth’s investigation remains silent, the New Hampshire Board of Tax and Land Appeals will be evaluating the city during today’s hearing. On June 23, the city filed a motion to the BTLA asking to delay the hearing, citing an ongoing investigation into management issues.

“The city engaged a major law firm to investigate certain management issues within the Assessing Department to which the board’s orders allude,” the motion states, in part.

The motion also references the city’s plan to complete a full measure and list reassessment for the tax year of 2022 in its reasoning for asking for the BTLA to delay the hearing beyond Oct. 1.

The board denied the motion, stating that despite the city’s plans to improve the department, the BTLA finds that conducting the hearing is still warranted and appropriate.

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Fight

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Friday, Gregg made a pit stop at his old school in Nashua. He ran from Bedford, Massachusetts, to World Academy on Friday to speak with Middle School Enrichment Campers who are in the middle of their Become the Leader You Want to Be camp. He was also greeted by members of Nashua Fire Rescue, who presented him with a check for his fundraiser.

Gregg was on day 270 of 275 when he stopped in at World Academy and was able to share his story with a very curious group of students.

Gregg found his love of running at a young age and often ran with his father around Nashua. He was also inspired to run at a young age after watching The Terry Fox Story, a movie that centers around a man who lost his leg to cancer and runs across Canada.

Once Gregg grew up, he eventually moved out

to the West Coast to work for Apple Inc. in Cupertino, California. While at Apple, he served as one of the principal engineers for Apple Pay and helped program a number of programs.

At the age of 40, he realized he was reaching another phase in his life. He had been interested in supporting firefighters after he saw the crucial role they played in combating California’s wildfires.

He eventually quit his job, bought his childhood home in Nashua and embarked upon his journey home, all while raising funds for, and meeting with, firefighters.

“It’s been a weird career, but it’s OK. Careers are not meant to be in straight lines,” Gregg said.

He began his journey on Nov. 6. In nine months, he’s touched ground in 24 states and covered more than 5,000 miles.

“If I ran from California to New Jersey, touched the Atlantic Ocean and then ran back, that’s the amount of miles I’ve covered,” Gregg said.

To make the trek manageable, he travels with

a team, who follows him with an RV and a support car, while making sure he has everything he needs. He has also been able to stay with friends along the way.

It seems every run has been different for Gregg. On his journey, he has run through thunderstorms, heat waves and snow.

“It was crazy sometimes, but we adapted and we kept moving on and tried to do the best we could,” Gregg said.

He also ran through national parks, Native American reservations, deserts and even Disneyland. Gregg has documented his entire trip by journaling.

Gregg said along the way, he has also seen llamas, dogs, rabbits, gerbils, rattle snakes, scorpions, turtles and alligators, along with what would soon become his next pet.

At one point while running a grueling route from Savannah, Georgia to Atlanta, Gregg said he heard “meow” behind him.

“I look behind me and see this little kitten is running behind me, so I picked up the kitten and adopted it,” Gregg said.

He named the kitten Ash and will be meeting Ash, along with his girlfriend and their other cat Cinder, when he crosses his finish line in Concord.

For Gregg, this journey has not only been about seeing new sights and hearing diverse voices from all he has encountered along the way – it is about recognizing the dedication of firefighters across the country.

“Firefighters have been the unsung heroes in California for the past two decades, combating our massive forest fires and keeping our communities as safe as possible,” Gregg stated in his blog, which he uses to document his journey. “Many have paid the ultimate sacrifice in their line of work. And many more are now fighting for their lives against cancer.”

Gregg plans to finish his trek Wednesday evening when he crosses his finish line at the New Hampshire State House in Concord.

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Hassan

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In Washington, D.C., Hassan said one of her priorities is to follow the example that New Hampshire residents regularly set – putting differences aside to get results. She shared a number of different proposals to which she is committed. She also discussed a commitment to fiscal responsibility.

“Our entrepreneurs and small business owners are at the forefront of technological innovations, from everything on cybersecurity to health care, and we must ensure that they have the support they need to draw it and grow it,” Hassan said.

She said in the Senate, she is working to double the federal Research and Development Tax Credit for startups, while hoping to extend it to more small businesses.

“The R & D tax credit bolsters the efforts of businesses to invest in the development of new innovative products that lead to job creation and a stronger economy,”

Hassan said. “By expanding this tax credit, we can ensure that Granite Staters starting up their own business have the resources that they need to turn their innovative ideas into reality.”

In turn, Hassan said companies must also ensure that they have the needed workforce.

“Unfortunately, too many people are lacking the skills and support that they need to enter and remain in the workforce,” Hassan said.

She spoke on her recent proposal of the bipartisan Gateway to Careers Act, which was recently endorsed by the Business Roundtable.

This act will provide grants to support partnerships involving community or technical colleges and workforce development programs.

Hassan said these partnerships would help remove many of the barriers that prevent many people from completing a two-year degree or obtaining other credentials by connecting students to support services such as housing, career counseling, child care, mental health care and other services.

Hassan also discussed the Jobs Act, which would close the skills gap by covering high quality and regular short training job programs that “meet students where they are and help them achieve the next big step.”

Lastly, Hassan focused on rising health care costs. She said that there have been some bipartisan agreements on health care costs, such as unexpected medical bills for those who believed their care was covered.

Hassan said she is working to take on Big Pharma to lower prescription drug prices.

She said a bill currently under consideration by the Senate Finance Committee would cap out-of-pocket costs for seniors on Medicare Part D and

crack down on pharmaceutical companies that raise drug prices higher than the rate of inflation.

Hassan said this could save health care beneficiaries more than \$30 billion in premiums and out-of-pocket costs, and would save taxpayers \$100 billion in Medicare and Medicaid spending during a 10-year period.

“No one should have to decide between buying their prescriptions and heating their home or putting food on the table, but these are the type of choices that Americans and Granite Staters are devastatingly having to make,” Hassan said.

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Action

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He also said that “hate, white supremacy, and acts of domestic terror” have no place in New Hampshire or anywhere in the country.

“While we will never know all the things that lead a person to commit acts of evil, we must be mindful that the mental health crisis gripping our state and nation is a significant factor,” he said.

The rally in Concord became tense toward the end, when gun-right supporters

arrived. One had a placard arguing that the bills were unnecessary because the state has such a lower murder rate. Others argued the bills would infringe on their Second Amendment rights.

“This is a constitutional right that shall not be infringed and that it would be nothing short of tyrannical to engage in behavior that limits the ability of law-abiding citizens to have access to firearms and live in peace without the police coming door to door and knocking them down in order to take their weapons,” said Brennan Robinson, a 21-year-old from Webster.

Former executive sues Tinder

LOS ANGELES (AP) – A former executive at the dating site Tinder sued the company and its former CEO on Monday alleging he sexually assaulted her and the company fired her in retaliation for her complaint.

Rosette Pambakian said in the lawsuit filed in Los Angeles Superior Court that former Match Group and Tinder CEO Gregory Blatt made a

lewd overture to her at a company holiday party in 2016 at a Los Angeles hotel.

Pambakian said she went with two work friends to a hotel room upstairs to get away from Blatt, but he later showed up and groped and kissed her without consent. She said her two colleagues, including Blatt’s executive assistant, witnessed the encounter.

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