From the Cascade Mountains to the Coast Range, innovation continues to be a driving force in the mid-valley’s health care.

And it’s innovation that’s engaging consumers and providers alike. It includes the medical students just wrapping up their first year at Western University’s College of Osteopathic Medicine of the Pacific—Northwest as well as longtime veterans of the health care field, working to help create a Coordinated Care Organization to serve the mid-valley’s Oregon Health Care patients — an effort which could point the way to far-reaching reform of our entire health care system.

It’s innovation that includes researchers working to find ways to encourage more physical activity among elementary school students. It’s innovation that could help to open new vistas for videoconferencing, with plenty of opportunities to expand doctor training and patient care. It’s innovation that has made handwritten prescriptions a thing of the past.

In this section, you’ll also read about individual innovators: The medical students who are thinking about ways to improve community health, both locally and globally. The medical director who’s been working on electronic medical records systems for two decades and now can see what a revolution these systems could ignite.

The researcher who thinks he and his colleagues might have found a way to stop wisdom teeth from becoming such a literal pain. And the artist who’s finding ways to connect the dots between the arts and healing, a bridge between body and soul.

It’s all innovation that’s going on right here, in the mid-valley — and this section (a sequel to a similar section we did last year) barely scratches the surface of what’s going on. It’s an explosion of new thinking, new concepts, new processes.

Turn the page to begin reading about these innovators, people determined to leave their mark on our health care system by finding new ways to help us lead healthier lives.
Mary Van Denend, arts coordinator for the Arts Center, stands among a mosaic mural recently at the Good Samaritan Regional Medical Center. The mural, which is a community art project, was created by arts care patients, members of the public and medical staff.

Program melds art and medicine

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Disabilities and cancer treatment are two of the most challenging health issues, but in the mid-valley, The Arts Center in Corvallis has created a program to bring beauty and healing to an otherwise uncomfortable necessity.

Mary Van Denend, ArtCenter coordinator for The Arts Center, has run the ArtCare program for about eight years. The program brings artists and art projects to hospitals in the United States and Lebanon, and in sites elsewhere.

The program is just beginning at North Lincoln Hospital, in Corvallis. The program provides working artists, including painters, sculptors, poets, quilters and a variety of other artists, who do what Van Denend called a “double duty” – in other words, out of the way of nurses and doctors, those artists can use their time to create art projects. Patients are hoisted up to displace machinery in the hospital and provide “a calm and a different focus,” Van Denend said.

What happens, Van Denend said, is a total immersion for a couple of hours or days. The art programs are offered to all patients, in oncology and mental health settings.

“This is the only program of its kind in the world,” Van Denend said. “They become artists and they frame their work.”

Van Denend said the artists are able to work one-on-one with every nurse and technician. They can paint an entire mural over a slower pace, offering a calm and a different focus. Van Denend said it is not uncommon for patients to become so engrossed in the work that it provides the main motivation for their hospital stay.

“Van Denend said it was that the patients would not be able to do this program in a hospital. "It is satisfying and unique to be part of this," Van Denend said.

The program began in 2004 when The Arts Center received a small grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to set up a site manifestation at Good Samaritan Regional Medical Center. Ceramic tiles were created and a painting was done outside the colony. Around the same time, Van Denend began a group of local artists, who worked on murals and other opportunities to play a role in patient care.

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The program is the perfect balance of art and patient care, she added. "It is all about building relationships, "Van Denend said.

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