

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF OREGON PSR

By Joy Spalding, PhD, Oregon PSR Board Member

Physicians for Social Responsibility was founded in 1961 by Helen Caldicott, MD, an Australian pediatrician who had lived through periods of war and the use of the atom bomb, as well as continued testing in the Pacific. The story of *On the Beach*, which took place in Australia, had haunted her. She was working in the United States at Harvard as a medical faculty member when she took up her work for the nuclear-freeze movement. Caldicott had a platform for speaking on the topic, organizing two organizations she called "MINE" in her 1996 autobiography, *A Desperate Passion*.

One was the Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament (WAND), the second was Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR). Both came to the forefront of the freeze movement, and with her leadership, thousands of concerned citizens were roused to push for action by all levels of government across the world. International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) came into being as groups of physicians joined together in a number of countries in this effort, becoming an umbrella organization for PSR universally.

Dr. Karen Steingart heard Caldicott speak at Harvard and was moved and motivated by what she heard to become a member of PSR. In 1961 she came to live in Portland to complete her training. During a march one evening protesting cuts in Medicaid, she walked with Dr. Charles Grossman, a progressive physician who had long been active in the community. She told him about having heard Caldicott speak and how PSR became the vehicle for spreading anti-nuclear information, educating and promoting action. Dr. Steingart was sure that here in Portland they could form a chapter. So, as they marched, she convinced Charlie to join in efforts to organize local physicians and health care providers for what would become Portland PSR, and eventually Oregon PSR as other new groups grew up around the state.

They talked about it with their friends and associates, often around the kitchen table, gathering informally and enjoying good fellowship in the process. They began the formal work of becoming Portland PSR with a retreat on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1982. They proposed to form a non-profit corporation with the purpose of educating physicians, health professionals and the public about the medical consequences of nuclear weapons and nuclear war.

The goals were to develop and maintain continued professional and public awareness of the health and social consequences of nuclear warfare. The plan was to have a cadre of trained speakers with quality control of the materials and information presented to the community. Educational conferences, publishing informational articles and using a range of available media were proposed as mechanisms to spread our messages. Thus was born the Oregon