

MEMRAMCOOK-TANTRAMAR COMMUNITY TASK FORCE

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Local Action Group Collaborates on Healthcare Challenges

Community interest in medical services for the Tantramar region has been heightened by the impending departure of two family physicians from their Sackville practices. Members of the Rural Health Action Group (RHAG) are meeting with officials of the Horizon Healthcare Network to help devise interim solutions to the anticipated shortage.

“Progress is already under way to explore short-term and long-term options,” said Dr. Ross Thomas, a retired Sackville physician and member of RHAG. “Possibly some sort of clinic could be established for patients without a family doctor or Nurse Practitioner, where a Patient Navigator would assist in arranging referrals, prescription renewals, lab tests and the like.”

The volunteer RHAG was formed over a year ago in response to reduction in the hours at the Emergency Department of the Sackville Memorial Hospital, and the possible closure of acute care beds. Vigorous protests by local residents rapidly gave rise to a consultative process that has assured the continuity of full service and initiated a new phase of collaboration (dubbed Collaboration 2.0) that will address a variety of healthcare priorities in the coming months.

Three of these have been highlighted for immediate action:

- Improvement in access to primary healthcare;
- Enhanced ambulatory care services and rural transportation.
- Ongoing collaboration on communication and governance;

Longer term action plans are being developed for:

- Mental Health and addictions.
- Nursing homes without walls and long-term care;
- Improved wellness through prevention and education;

Recently, the RHAG hosted a meeting attended by representatives of the Town of Tantramar, the Port Elgin Health Clinic, Mount Allison University, the Rotary Club of Sackville, the Sackville Memorial Hospital Auxiliary and Foundation, and the Drew Nursing Home (with regrets received from representatives from Strait Shores). At this event, those present formed an RHAG Steering Group, to provide analysis, strategic planning, and communication for the community effort. Two or three of its members will be designated to attend meetings of the Collaboration 2.0 Steering Group hosted by Horizon, in order to track progress on the priorities and to ensure two-way communication.

Three joint working groups were also established, one for each of the three initial priorities noted above. Each of these groups is chaired by an appropriate Horizon representative, includes community representation, and has the power to recruit appropriate expertise as needed.

“With this community structure in place,” stated RHAG co-chair John Higham, “we are confident in our ability to continue collaborating with Horizon on addressing short-term needs and the development of long-term strategies for good and consistent rural healthcare throughout our region.”

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