

Grow Our Own Physician moves forward with plans

Written by Chris Lee

The task force associated with the Grow Our Own Physician program has decided to move forward with progress in recruiting a physician to the Holyoke area by creating a video of Holyoke and Melissa Memorial Hospital.

In the beginning, the task force laid out a two-fold mission. The first part is to raise community awareness and support for the Grow Our Own Physician program, while the other is to encourage individuals to apply for the opportunity or seek information.

The first of two goals to help achieve their mission was to speak with local news media to raise awareness. The second was to make a video to showcase the community and the hospital.

The idea would be to burn multiple DVDs to send out to help in recruiting. They could also link it to the MMH website, YouTube and other websites.

The task force looked into different ideas for creating a video. They looked into professional companies, someone with local ties who creates videos for a college and everything in between.

The task force decided to make a recommendation to the hospital district board to move forward with a professional company from Kansas.

IMG (Integrated Media Group LLC) has had a lot of success creating rural small-town USA videos, according to MMH administrator John Ayoub. They will do all the work which will include writing a script and shooting the video.

The task force felt the professionalism was key. They reviewed similar videos the company has made and were very pleased.

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The district is continually spending money on recruiting efforts and the task force believes the money spent for the video will be well worth it in the end. The video will be something the district will own and can use for other recruitment efforts as well.

During a special meeting Monday, Feb. 13, East Phillips County Hospital District board members unanimously voted to allow Ayoub to negotiate up to \$25,000 and to contract with IMG to produce a hospital/community physician recruitment video.

“I think people will be very pleased with the product we put together,” Ayoub said.

How it all began

More than a year ago, discussion began about physician retention and recruitment and what could be done to keep doctors here, and more importantly, attract physicians interested in living and practicing in a rural area.

The hospital district got in touch with the Melissa Memorial Hospital Foundation and both agreed to provide funds to get the initiative rolling.

“Folks that grow up in a rural area are more likely to practice in a rural area,” Ayoub said.

Ayoub mentioned there are two challenges. The first is finding a provider who wants to work in a rural area with fewer resources. Family practice doctors in metro areas can refer to specialists all day and night and never take call in the E.R. In rural areas, they will be dipping their hands in much more.

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Secondly, a provider needs to be found who wants to stay in a rural area—someone who wants to raise a family.

“We think we would be much more successful recruiting a person to stay if we could find somebody that grew up in this area, or whose spouse grew up in this area,” Ayoub said. “I don’t think we can underestimate the impact that has.”

There are three “tracks” or goals the hospital district and foundation have laid out. The first is a short-term goal to recruit someone back to the area. The second track is to find a student or students who are currently in medical school. The third and final long-term track is to look at current high schoolers interested in the medical field who may think about coming back to the area.

Ayoub noted they obviously wouldn’t be signing a contract with a 17-year-old but would help provide direction and create interest in the medical field and rural medicine.

To get started, seven people associated either with the hospital or the foundation came together to form the task force. After discussion, they believed it would be beneficial to get input from the community. Seven others not affiliated with the hospital or foundation were sought out to volunteer their time.

Those on the task force include MMH board members Sheryl Farnsworth and Steve Young, MMHF board members Linda Alberts and Paul Wickenkamp, MMHF executive director Cherrie Brown, MMH CEO John Ayoub, MMH CFO Greg Was, Jessie Ruiz, Jim Kienholz, John Schneider, Julie Wiebke, Marc Maelzer, Shannon Schlachter and Terry Martin. Farnsworth serves as the chair of the task force.

Ayoub and Farnsworth have both said they feel the task force has worked really well as a group and have come up with some great ideas. They also appreciate the time the volunteers have given. They hope the video will be the first key step in getting providers to Holyoke who want to be a part of the community.

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