

Hospital to address health needs survey

Written by Kyle Arnoldy

Through public surveys and community health needs assessment meetings, members of the East Phillips County Hospital District board were able to identify the areas of health care that local residents deemed necessary.

During their Tuesday, Aug. 27 board meeting, members discussed the areas identified and what could be done to address these issues.

Over 130 people participated in the survey to help prioritize areas of need in health care in the community. Ten percent of all surveys were taken in Spanish.

Dental health was named the top priority by survey respondents as local availability is non-existent. Promotion of the need for a healthy lifestyle and the education for the different dental needs were also factors that led to dental health being the top area of need.

While 86 percent of those who utilize the services offered by the district responded favorably to the job performance, for the most part, the areas identified had to do with the community's level of awareness of programs already in place.

Of the nine areas identified, at least six take into account a lack of knowledge of what is available as contributing factors.

According to the survey, several members of the community could benefit from being educated on the specialists and services at MMH, financial aid assistance availability, services for continuum of care outside of assisted living and nursing home care, resources available for those who are uninsured, mental health provider options and unhealthy youth behaviors such as substance abuse and teen pregnancy.

The lack of local child care providers and transportation problems associated with price and scheduling were also discussed.

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MMH Administrator John Ayoub encourages people to show up at the last community health needs assessment meeting, scheduled for Thursday, Sept. 26 at 5:30 p.m. at the Event Center. A light meal will be provided at the meeting.

At the meeting, the district will present ideas on possible ways to address some of the issues outlined in the survey. While some areas the district can approach on their own, Ayoub acknowledged that other areas will require a cooperative effort from multiple community groups.

MMH passes unannounced state surveys with flying colors

The State of Colorado unexpectedly arrived at MMH recently for the purpose of conducting two surveys—the State of Colorado licensure survey and the federal Medicare Conditions of Participation survey.

The licensure survey ensures that health care facilities meet set standards of service and quality in compliance with state law and regulation. MMH was cited for one deficiency in the survey regarding updating policies. Ayoub said they are already in the process of creating and submitting a plan of correction.

“This was the best survey this organization has ever had, and I think you should be proud of the work the staff did and does and certainly be proud of the results,” Ayoub told board members at their monthly meeting.

The Medicare Conditions of Participation survey determines whether a citation of non-compliance is appropriate, based on violations of the statute of regulations. MMH had no deficiencies during the survey.

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Although it is not completely unheard of to have zero deficiencies, Ayoub said he was extremely pleased with the results.

“At the end of the day, I am very proud of our organization and the results we attained,” Ayoub said.

Critical access hospitals could be stripped of status

Ayoub also took time to inform council members that a report released a few weeks ago by the Office of Inspector General recommends the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to seek legislative authority to decertify critical access hospitals that do not meet location requirements.

The location requirement states that critical access hospitals must be more than a 35-mile drive from a hospital or another critical access hospital or be separated by more than a 15-mile drive through mountainous terrain or areas where only secondary roads are available from other hospitals or another critical access hospital.

Although Holyoke does not meet the location requirements, it was able to keep its status in the past as a critical access hospital because it was deemed a “necessary provider.”

If it is decided to move forward with reviewing hospitals and stripping hospitals of their critical access statuses, over 800 hospitals nationwide would lose their designation, including MMH.

Ayoub noted that OIG has been forthright that the decision is based on saving money. He believes they have failed to consider that a lot of the organizations would not survive if they lost their critical access designation. Areas could lose hospitals, lose access to care and the quality of care could drop. He stated that the proposition would not do service to anyone in rural

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America.

Viaero Wireless to put up towers on MMH land

Board members authorized Ayoub to sign a contract allowing the sale of a plot of land on hospital grounds to Viaero Wireless for the purpose of building a 4G tower.

The tower will benefit residents of the city who use Viaero and will boost the Viaero signal within the hospital.

Earlier this summer, MMH installed cell signal boosters that increased cell reception in the hospital for those on Verizon Wireless. The Viaero tower will allow MMH to increase cell coverage for Viaero without purchasing more wireless boosters.

The tower also serves as a safety precaution for MMH. As of now, there is only one hardline for internet access at the hospital. If the hardline is cut, the hospital loses internet connectivity. As MMH moves away from paper medical records with the implementation of the electronic medical records, losing internet connection would mean that MMH staff would have no access to patient information. Running fiber connection to the tower will allow the hospital to stay connected at all times.

Other business

In other business Aug. 27, board members:

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---agreed to appoint Melissa Prante to the Melissa Memorial Hospital Corporation board.

—entered in executive session for 20 minutes for the purpose of negotiations and personnel.

—announced that the next board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, Sept. 24.

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