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Committee set to address doctor recruitment

Paul Frey, Olds Albertan

Town councillors established an ad hoc committee to address recommendations of the Olds Physician Recruitment Committee at the June 23 town council meeting.

The committee will be made up of Coun. Harvey Walsh, one member of the Olds Institute for Community and Regional Development board, Mel Giles, chair of the physicians recruitment committee and Norm McInnis, chief administrative officer of the Town of Olds.

The ad hoc committee will be looking at potentially providing a one-time accommodation allowance of up to \$6,000 per physician recruited to the community; a one-time family community membership allowance of up to \$1,000; and a one-time transportation allowance of up to \$3,000 for a total package of \$10,000 per doctor recruited to the community.

McInnis said the ad hoc committee will be going forward to study the recommendations from the OICRD, which vetted the proposal from the physician recruitment committee before it went forward to town council.

In light of changes in the landscape of health services since the re-organization of the health regions, McInnis said the new chief executive officer of Alberta Health Services, Dr. Stephen Duckett, has stated that local incentives may not be in the collective best interests of medicine in Alberta. Consequently, at the next Municipal Area Partnership meeting on July 21, officials representing rural health on the new health services board — and the local zone — will be speaking about incentives at the local level as well as an update on the situation regarding the new health services board.

"We will specifically be asking the question about the views of the new board on incentives at the local level. We want to validate those recommendations (of the physicians recruitment committee), see if they're still sound and we'll come back with further recommendations on what an incentive program may look like for the Town of Olds," McInnis said.

Asked if the committee can go forward without incentives, McInnis said the physicians recruitment committee identified several issues, including how incentives in Olds could impact doctors in other surrounding communities, that need to be looked at.

"We (also) hear threats that some of the rural hospitals may be closing — some close to us. What sort of ramifications do those types of actions have on this recommendation, I think, is something we have to understand before we pull the trigger on any recommendations," he said.

McInnis noted the recommendations of the physician recruitment committee are only a starting point for the ad hoc committee, which will be looking at a range of health-related issues.

Two of the issues the committee will be looking at include use of the emergency room and how that is impacting doctors and patients as well as studying how to help the staffing situation at both the clinics in town.

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