

## **Harlan Stern fills vacant seat on hospital board**

Written by Chris Lee

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Harlan Stern became the newest member of the East Phillips County Hospital District board at the March 23 meeting.

Stern was appointed to fill the vacant seat left by Ray Malleck who announced his resignation in January. Stern will fill the seat until the May election, even though there won't be an election.

Incumbents Steve Deaver, Sheryl Farnsworth and Steve Young all turned in nomination intents for re-election for four-year terms. Since Stern filed for the two-year seat, Melissa Memorial Hospital (MMH) Administrator John Ayoub was given the authority to cancel the election since all seats would be filled with the four candidates. He canceled the election March 4 and submitted the necessary paperwork to the Secretary of State.

A resolution was passed by the board last year, naming Ayoub the election official and giving him the authority to cancel the election if there weren't more candidates than seats available.

Ayoub mentioned there was interest from two other potential candidates but of those, one didn't get a nomination form turned in and the other didn't meet one of the criteria to serve on the board.

Since Malleck served as vice president of the board, members elected Deaver to the position.

## **Health care reform overview presented**

One of the larger topics of the week was the House passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care Act (H.R. 3590). The reform package passed Sunday, March 21. Ayoub gave board members a quick overview of the package and the effects it may have on MMH.

The House also voted on a side-car package Sunday night called the Reconciliation Act of

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2010. Together the bills would extend coverage to 32 million people, and the Congressional Budget Office estimates the legislation will cost \$940 billion over 10 years.

Ayoub told board members many of the things included in the package won't take effect until 2014, so "changes" won't be recognized right away. The things that will begin immediately will be things such as the option of having dependent children stay on their parents' insurance until they are age 26.

Ayoub said there is still a possibility the package won't be set in stone as there are different reconciliations. It was also reported there are a number of states coming together to sue the federal government as a result of the House passing the bill.

One aspect of the bill Ayoub wanted to notify board members of are the rural hospital provisions. This aspect sustains and improves access to care in rural areas through various improvements such as:

—extends the outpatient hold-harmless payments for certain hospitals in rural areas.

—improves payments of low-volume hospitals.

—ensures that Critical Access Hospitals are paid 101 percent of costs for all outpatient services regardless of the billing methods elected.

—extends and expands the Rural Community Hospital Demonstration Program.

—extends the Medicare Dependent Hospital program for one year.

—extends the Medicare Rural Hospital Flexibility Program through 2010.

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—extends reasonable cost reimbursement for laboratory services in small rural hospitals.

“For the most part, this legislation will not have a negative impact on Melissa Memorial Hospital and East Phillips County Hospital District,” Ayoub said.

Down the road, the administrator said staffing may become an issue. With those people who haven’t had health care and will now, they are going to start going to the doctor. Traffic will increase and staffing will be something they might have to look at.

Deaver asked if the reform bill will affect the Colorado Indigent Care Program CICIP or vice versa. Ayoub said the payments will drop, but eligibility requirements for Medicaid will be expanded. Less people will be in CICIP and more will be in Medicaid.

Young reported for the MMH Foundation saying the golf tournament is set for Saturday, Aug. 21. The foundation has also been discussing the idea of holding a big fund raising event each year, according to Young.

They also are looking into getting the clock up by the July 22 50-year anniversary celebration.

The Community Linkages committee was contacted about advertising the Hispanic Health Fair schedule with the upcoming Cinco de Mayo celebration, according to Farnsworth. There was also a question raised about holding the health fair with the Cinco de Mayo celebration at the Event Center but committee members thought it would be best to keep the health fair at HHS.

CFO Greg Was said MMH saw a month where demand for services was lower, which resulted in a lower month financially. Activity was below normal for the month of February. Things are way ahead of where they were last year, according to Ayoub.

### Administrator reports activity

Ayoub reported the 2009 audit went smoothly and gave praise to CFO Was for his efforts in the process. Ayoub said when the company left, there were no major issues. A tentative April date has been scheduled to hold a special audit meeting.

MMH has taken some different steps when it comes to marketing. A quarterly newsletter will become a regular thing and the inaugural edition was sent out Thursday, March 25.

Other strategies include one in the form of chocolate candy, first aid kits for the 50-year celebration and dietary pamphlets.

Ayoub said the ambulance service will be changing soon as it is Haxtun's turn to purchase a new ambulance. The change will mean Holyoke will now use 2002 and 2006 ambulances while Haxtun will use a 1999 and 2010. He also mentioned the color scheme will now be the same for both Holyoke and Haxtun to cut down on costs when it is time to change.

Recent questions have been asked about patient transfers, according to the administrator. Ayoub said their priority is to the community. When someone calls 911 they expect an ambulance to show up to assist them.

Ayoub said they try to accommodate for transfers when possible, but with two ambulances it's tough.

He said the day before Tuesday's meeting, there were three patients who needed to be transferred to seek care. He said one of the ambulances took one patient while the other two were taken by ambulances from Wray and Yuma.

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As reported during last month's meeting, an accountant had been hired at MMH. Ayoub said that person has decided to go in a different direction so a search for someone else is being conducted. He mentioned there are two candidates and he hoped to have them interviewed and possibly have made a hire by the end of last week.

Deb Tatum has been hired as a full-time employee as the director of the laboratory.

Dr. Kelby Bethards' contract has been adjusted as he has taken on another assignment, according to Ayoub. He will continue to hold his position in the clinic but will not be here on weekends. Ayoub said Dr. Ernest Castro and Dr. Mark Hoenig will help cover weekends.

The annual Prevent Alcohol and Risk-Related Trauma in Youth (PARTY) program was held with HHS students and Ayoub said he was pleased with the work Christie Winckler provided to make the process a success. He also mentioned there was a very positive response through the evaluations.

A diagnostic mobile imaging unit is now being utilized at MMH, according to Ayoub. He said the staff is appreciative and likes the images it produces.

Ultrasound is another service the hospital is looking into. Ayoub said Tim Johnson is acting as the leader in narrowing down possibilities of machines to purchase. He said they think they have the one they want and will conduct an on-site test Thursday, April 1.

A capital budget item is a colonoscope. It was budgeted for about \$65,000. Grant money was received a while ago to purchase a scope washer/sterilizer. The company it was purchased from is having some issues with the FDA.

Ayoub said they don't need to purchase a new scope this year but he may come back to the board with a request to buy a new washer/sterilizer.

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MMH continues to keep on top of emergency preparedness. Ayoub said they have conducted fire drills with staff members and hope to conduct tornado drills soon.

He also mentioned he and Johnson attended Incident Command Structure (ICS) training in Yuma. The training is to help everyone who responds to an emergency to understand and use the same terminology and structure.

The administrator said a contract has been signed with Inquiry Credentialing Services to provide the medical staff credentialing packets. In the past, Human Resources Director Sharon Greenman has put them together.

The Medicaid provider fee paperwork has been filed, according to Ayoub. An early April date is expected for Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to approve or deny the fee.

Ayoub said the percentage for the redistribution fee may not be what was presented at the last meeting.

A consultant was brought in to perform a charge description master review. Ayoub said they are looking at appropriately pricing different services throughout the hospital.

One example is Aspirin. Ayoub said the hospital charges more for Aspirin than a drug store. This is because there is time and people who are included in the process. Ayoub said they have decreased the cost. This is just one adjustment and Julie Vernon will give a presentation at the next board meeting, according to Ayoub.

### **Other business**

In other business March 23, the hospital board:

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—noted the next board meeting will be Tuesday, April 27 at 5:30 p.m.

—noted the medical staff bylaws are ready for review by a lawyer.

—approved credentialing for two-year re-appointments for Michelle Soriano, MD (OB/GYN); Joseph Bonelli, MD (pathology); and Paul “Val” Meredith, CRNA (allied staff).