

Local hospital board addresses legislative issues

Written by Kyle Arnoldy

Colorado Hospital Association president and chief executive officer Steven Summer joined the local hospital board Tuesday, June 25 for the monthly East Phillips County Hospital District board meeting.

Summer presented board members with a legislative overview for Denver.

Of the over 600 bills in consideration at the start of legislature for Colorado, CHS monitored close to 140 of them, taking a hard position on roughly 15-20 specific bills.

One bill board members specifically discussed had to do with the expansion of Medicaid and how it ties back to the Patient Protection Affordable Care Act.

Hospitals have the option to expand Medicaid, with the federal government footing the bill for the first few years. Over the course of the following 10 years, the state would be responsible for covering 10 percent of the expansion.

“When you think about how many people we can add here in Colorado, hundreds of thousands of people, and the federal government is going to pay for 100 percent of it in the beginning, that’s a good deal,” Melissa Memorial Hospital administrator John Ayoub said.

The question then becomes how does the state go about paying the 10 percent?

A funding mechanism is in place in which the state taxes hospitals to bring in money. That money is then sent to the federal government who then matches the funds. The state then divvies up the money. The money is put to use for hospitals and health care.

The amount the hospital is initially taxed is based on the size of the hospital. The money that is divided up amongst Colorado hospitals is based on the amount lost due to Medicaid.

Colorado hospitals have a pact so that no hospital loses money in the process. Aside from

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being able to insure more patients, MMH will actually make money in the deal.

Administrator reports

Ayoub reported on a number of topics during the meeting.

One of the more exciting news was that MMH will be welcoming three new members to the team Monday, July 8. Dr. Aaron Wilson will begin his tenure as a provider, but will likely not begin seeing patients until the end of the month. Sam Kuhlman will take over as the health information management director and Carolyn Cambridge will begin as a med tech.

“We’re quite pleased to be able to fill these positions with good people,” Ayoub said.

Ayoub also noted that the hospital was able to refinance the mortgage of the hospital. With around \$13 million still owed on the building, the hospital was able to refinance the interest down to 4.17 percent from 6.7 percent.

About eight months ago, Ayoub said the hospital first began looking into refinancing. As the payment penalty dropped one percent every year, it became more and more justifiable to pay the payment penalty for paying off the loan early.

Even after paying the fine, the hospital stands to save \$220,000 a year in savings and interest. Over the life of the loan, the hospital is set to save about \$2.58 million.

The meeting also marked the first time that the board was introduced to the new stroke robot.

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Beginning Monday, July 1, a stroke robot will be in use at MMH. The machine is plugged into Swedish Medical Center in Denver, which Ayoub said was one of the top three hospitals in the country as far as caring for stroke patients.

This means that if someone were to go to MMH showing signs of a stroke, they will have a world-renown neurologist interacting with them, reading their CT scans and communicating with the doctor at the bedside.

MMH receives positive reviews

The Colorado Health Service Corps, a group of volunteers who receive federal money to work in underserved areas, recently performed a review of MMH to ensure doctors in the program are performing at an acceptable level and deserving of the money they receive for being a part of the program.

Considering the population of the region and the amount of doctors, Holyoke is considered to be an underserved area.

In the hospital's first review, it was determined by the group that MMH was up to par with the standards set for doctors and hospitals. Ayoub stated that the group had many complimentary comments about the doctors and the site.

MMH was also active during Dandelion Daze, having more than 30 people take part in a computer survey of the hospital.

Ayoub encourages everyone to take part in the survey, which can be found at www.melissame

morial.org under the community tab. The survey will be available throughout July, in both English and Spanish.

The community health needs assessment survey touches on topics such as hospital care, home care, insurance, pharmacy, ambulance, any physical and fitness activity and much more that deal with what Holyoke has to offer to help promote a healthier lifestyle. It is an important part of helping the hospital determine what types of programs and services they can offer to better take care of the community.

Other business

In other business June 25, board members:

—approved credentialing of Krishna Murthy, MD, allergist.

—announced that the next board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, July 23.

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