



## MEDIA RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**MR# 2018067**

**DATE: 22 August 2018**

**RE: Amherst town council statement on physician crisis at CRHCC**

**AMHERST, Nova Scotia** – Below is a statement read by Mayor David Kogon on behalf of the Amherst town council in regards to the physician shortage at the Cumberland Regional Health Care Centre:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Like you, the entire Amherst town council is very concerned about the delivery of health care at the Cumberland Regional Health Care Centre and throughout Cumberland County.

Like you, the entire council believes there is a physician shortage that has reached the crisis stage at our hospital and, like you, we consider this to be an issue of prime importance.

It is why, even though the delivery of health care falls under provincial jurisdiction, the Amherst town council has been working with our partners – the Town of Oxford, the Municipality of the County of Cumberland and the Cumberland Health Care Task Force – to address this matter.

Before I tell you what we've done, a bit of history. In the early spring, I was approached by a local doctor and the past chairman of the Cumberland Health Authority who expressed concerns over the impact changes the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia made to defined licences, which led one of our three anesthetists to leave the community and threatened the ability of a second to stay. This, as has been mentioned in the local media, reduced our ability to provide elective surgeries at the hospital.

We were also made aware that virtually every department in the hospital is facing staffing shortages.

I immediately informed council of these concerns and held a meeting with Cumberland County Warden Al Gillis. Four days later, the warden and I met with Health Minister Randy DeLorey. While we did not get anything definitive from the minister, we made it clear the Cumberland Health Care Centre must remain a Level 2 regional hospital because it's critical to the sustainability of our region and the well-



being of our citizens.

We pointed out to the minister that there are times during the year when sending a patient to either Truro or Moncton isn't an option because of the weather, that the citizens of Amherst and Cumberland County deserve high-quality health-care services that are equal to those received by citizens in other parts of the province.

We further pointed that failing to keep the Cumberland Health Care Centre a Level 2 regional facility would create financial hardships for many of our citizens, particularly those living in poverty, who would face financial hardship by being forced to travel greater distances for routine medical procedures.

The minister concurred. To me that is reassuring.

Shortly after that, municipal leaders from throughout Cumberland County invited our local MLA and all members of the medical staff from the local hospital and from throughout the county to a meeting.

This meeting, held to hear the doctors' concerns and to show them our support, took place in May.

Shortly after, the Cumberland Health Care Task Force was formed. It consisted of medical leaders, municipal leaders and our MLAs. We immediately began focusing on the main issue, which to the task force was improving the recruitment of new physicians and the retention of existing doctors.

The task force was concerned that regional recruitment wasn't meeting local needs. It determined there had to be local recruitment efforts if we were to attract physicians to Amherst and Cumberland County.

One of the first requests from the task force was for area municipalities to contribute to a local recruitment fund. We, the members of Amherst town council, unanimously approved a \$10,000 contribution – the amount the task force asked us to give. This money was to be used to develop the materials that will be taken to job fairs and recruitment packages for locum doctors, which are physicians who temporarily fill vacancies at the hospital, and medical students who are training here.

These packages have been developed. They include things like a letter from me welcoming prospective doctors to the community, free passes to the Cumberland YMCA and the Amherst Golf Course, and visitor, shopping and activity guides.

Several have already been given out to locum physicians and prospective recruits, and the feedback on them has been positive.

The taskforce has also established recruitment and retention committees. Both have been actively pursuing their objectives.

We have had some successes: the task force has helped convince the province to increase remuneration for locums, modified the defined licence making it possible for those holding one to continue to work long-term and increased the ER fee schedule.



While these have helped in the short-term to ensure the continued operation of our hospital, the main resolution over the longer term will be and must be the recruitment and retention of physicians.

To that end, the entire Amherst town council fully supports the efforts of the task force and appreciates the changes that have occurred.

The task force has also asked municipalities to become involved in recruiting. The Town of Amherst is fully behind this request. That is why we committed the \$10,000. It is why Deputy-Mayor Sheila Christie and I are members, with the council's blessing, of the task force.

It is why I'm a member of the recruitment committee and have already participated in several site visits with physicians considering coming to our hospital. It's why I'll be going to a job fair in Toronto in November. It's why I'll be involved in any future recruitment effort.

As I've said, health care is a provincial responsibility, but this doesn't mean we should shrug our shoulders and see how it turns out. The members of council and I will always do whatever we can to ensure this stays on the front page until adequate, sustainable health care is available to the citizens of the Town of Amherst and Cumberland County.

I think we all agree that our local doctors along with municipal leaders must play a major part in recruiting physicians, so I will continue to be very actively involved in physician recruiting.

We have been heard by the provincial authorities and while some improvements have transpired we will continue to be vigilant. We will continue to work with all the partners involved towards maintaining a fully staffed regional hospital here as well as supporting the other health centres throughout the county.

We had hoped to be able to address the rally today, but now understand in speaking with our MLA that only hospital staff will be speaking in order to keep the event a non-**political** one.

Council supports keeping this event non-political.

On reflection, we also support the notion that the rally should hear only from staff members – they know the issues best.

Council is 100 per cent behind the doctors and staff at the Cumberland Regional Health Care Centre in their efforts to bring attention to the staff shortage that is currently threatening the delivery of sustainable health care in our community and our region.

We applaud their courage and initiative in ensuring that this issue stays on the front burner. Although much has been done, there clearly remains lots of work to do on this file.

We are calling on Health Minister Randy Delorey to respond immediately and directly to the concerns that have been brought forward at the two health-care rallies in our region this week.



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