

Council supports putting \$50,000 towards full-time physician recruiter

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Caledon Council is supporting a drive to bring more doctors to town.

At Council's November 28 meeting, Executive Director of the Hills of Headwaters Collaborative Ontario Health Team (HOHC OHT) Tracy Coffin made a presentation to Council on the funding case for a full-time physician recruiter.

The HOHC OHT is seeking support from the Town of Caledon, County of Dufferin, and Headwaters Health Care Centre in the amount of \$50,000 each.

Coffin said the HOHC OHT is a group of health and social care leaders that come together to improve the health and wellbeing of everyone in Dufferin and Caledon.

"Family physicians are very important to healthy communities and healthy people," said Coffin. "People without family physicians generally have much worse health outcomes because they are not being monitored, not being screened."

Coffin said recently, the HOHC OHT has been noticing some doctors retiring or leaving Dufferin and Caledon.

"It became very clear we needed to put some focus into recruiting [physicians] and retaining existing family physicians," she said.

The HOHC OHT put together a physician recruitment task force in January and it has been meeting ever since on a regular basis. In addition to finding ways to recruit physicians, the task force is developing plans of succession for retiring physicians, as Coffin said doctors are finding it hard to find people to take over their practices.

"We have two or three thousand people who have been left without physicians over the last nine months due to retirements," said Coffin, who noted the HOHC OHT refers to those without a family physician as unattached patients. "There are approximately 6,500 unattached patients that live in Dufferin and Caledon."

She added that this total doesn't take into account patients in Dufferin and Caledon who have a family physician in another community but would rather have one closer to home.

Coffin said the World Health Organization recommends 1,000 patients per doctor and that most doctors in Dufferin and Caledon have many more patients than that.

"That's a very heavy burden for the physicians and they are often struggling under that burden," said Coffin.

She said it's estimated Caledon will need 29 more physicians by 2031, and that's without taking into account retirements.

The proposed HOHC OHT physician recruiter would be an expert in how physician practice models work, how funding works, and would work for Dufferin, Caledon, and the Headwaters Health Care Centre. Coffin said it's a niche and complex role.

The recruiter would officially be an employee of the Headwaters Health Care Centre and have an estimated salary of \$91,200 plus benefits. Additional costs would come from sending the recruiter to events, and providing hiring incentives for physicians.

Ward 4 Councillor Nick de Boer suggested using the money instead to send local students to medical school and have them come

back to practice in the area. He said since doctor shortages are everywhere, he worries that recruiting doctors means taking them away from other communities who need them just as much.

Coffin said the recruiter is just one of many ways the HOHC OHT is trying to address the physician shortage.

Ward 1 Councillor Lynn Kiernan said it's an investment in the community when a medical school graduate decides to become a family physician. She said she's happy to support efforts to bring more physicians to Caledon.

Ward 3 Councillor Doug Maskell said needing 29 more physicians by 2031 is a symptom of the Province's plan to build more homes but not addressing the things communities need to accommodate that growth. He said the Province needs to come up with a comprehensive strategy to get more doctors in Ontario.

‘We’re in a war for talent with every municipality across the Province right now,’ said Maskell. ‘So unfortunately, all’s fair in love and war here? we have to meet our immediate needs, which [means] we have to embark on this recruitment strategy.’

Regional Councillor Christina Early said the lack of doctors in Ontario is becoming quite a crisis, and that she’d support the hiring of a physician recruiter.

Mayor Annette Groves said she’s happy to support the hiring of a recruiter. She views it as an investment in keeping the community, and by extension the workforce, healthy.

‘We need to invest in our community’s wellbeing, and that is investing in getting these doctors here,’ said Groves.

Groves said she feels for doctors who are experiencing burnout, and agreed more doctors are needed in the Province.

‘They’re not robots? we need to? knock on the Province’s door for some money to help these doctors,’ said Groves.

Council supported contributing \$50,000 to the hiring of a physician recruiter, though the County of Dufferin and Headwaters Health Care Centre will also need to agree to contribute in order for the hiring of a recruiter to go through.