

**HEALTH, SOCIAL, EDUCATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE MEETING  
HELD IN ROOM 318  
PUTNAM COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING  
CARMEL, NEW YORK 10512**

**Members: Chairman Sayeh, Legislators Crowley & Gouldman**

**Tuesday**

**May 14, 2024**

The meeting was called to order at 6:30PM by Chairwoman Sayegh who led in the Pledge of Allegiance. Upon roll call Legislator Crowley and Chairwoman Sayegh were present. Legislator Gouldman was absent.

**Item #3 – Discussion/Update/Putnam Hospital/PH President Dr. Mark Hirko**

Chairwoman Sayegh welcomed Dr. Mark Hirko, Putnam Hospital President and thanked him for coming to give an update.

Dr. Hirko stated the GoHealth Urgent Care Center has been open for approximately two (2) months. He said it is the largest urgent care system in America. He noted that approximately 70% of medical school graduates are going into specialty care. He stated the urgent care centers help alleviate the pressure on Emergency Rooms and wait times. He said they are partnering with health systems and partnering with outside groups to alleviate the stress we are seeing with lack of primary care. He said they have opened a practice in Mahopac and are adding another primary care doctor starting in the fall. He stated Carmel has two (2) doctors practicing there and adding a neurologist soon. He stated Brewster has six (6) physicians and adding another. He stated the staffing shortage is a national problem. He stated there was a staffing problem with the Infusion Center. He stated nurses left due to the volume of the patients and inexperience. He added they will be re-opening in June. He said GI (Gastroenterology) is another area that is growing rapidly. He stated they bought new equipment and have added upgrades to the OR (Operating Room) to handle the growth. He stated an agreement has been reached with Somers Orthopedics to be their hub for joint replacement surgery in the County. He stated women's health has been growing, but a little slow with labor and delivery. He said GYN (Gynecology) practice has been growing rapidly. He stated in the past there has been a problem with retention of employees but now they lead the system in retention, only 12% rate of turnover in the hospital. He stated the hospital has taken a hit in its quality score. He stated the problem occurred due to lack of staffing, not lack of care, and is encouraged by the leadership to maintain high quality standard of care. He stated the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary is coming up in October. He said there will be information coming out about this, announcing activities like Health Fairs, children's day in September, employee Octoberfest and other activities to engage the community. He stated he was excited to talk about the tentative agreement signed to affiliate

with Northwell Health. He stated formal approval is needed by New York State Department of Health, Office of Strategic Health in Connecticut and the Federal Trade Commission. He stated we are working to have the applications turned in by May 31, 2024. He noted the process will take eight (8) to sixteen months. He stated the legal teams have to meet and ensure there is no collusion in the interim. He stated this affiliation will create the 6<sup>th</sup> largest not-for-profit health system in America.

Chairwoman Sayegh thanked Dr. Hirko.

Legislator Addonizio said many local doctors are not delivering in Putnam Hospital and she questioned why.

Dr. Hirko stated Optum has pivoted to other facilities while over 70% of commercial patients in the ER are Optum based. He stated two (2) Nuvance based physicians are employed at the Hospital and have delivered over 40 babies since they re-opened Birthing Center over a year ago.

Chairwoman Sayegh questioned about the Infusion Center losing its staff.

Dr. Hirko stated there were three (3) nurses and it became extremely busy after the Cancer Center opened. He said there were 16-to-18-hour days plus weekends and it was beyond what was anticipated by the nurses. He said it involved chemotherapy, blood transfusions, iron infusions, and antibiotic infusions. He stated they have hired people and now have full staff.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated it is a huge benefit to have the Infusion Center in Putnam so cancer patients and senior citizens do not have to travel too far for treatment.

Dr. Hirko stated the whole area has been renovated including Oncology, Radiation Oncology and Infusion and it all will be in one place in the hospital and will be ready in June.

Legislator Crowley questioned if the impending transition with Northwell will help safe levels of staffing be more achievable for the doctors, nurses, and patients.

Dr. Hirko stated the main problems with staffing were related to COVID. He noted during that time greater than 24% of all health care workers quit and did not come back. He stated they are notified by the State weekly if their staffing requirements are being met. He stated there is no control over call out rate and noted that the staff is unionized.

Legislator Crowley questioned when the hospital became unionized.

Dr. Hirko stated in 2017 they became unionized.

Legislator Montgomery questioned if there a health crisis due to the high number of GI procedures.

Dr. Hirko stated the population is better educated regarding the guidelines for screening. He stated we have an aging population. He noted previously they did not know the numbers in private offices. He stated the health system's Cancer Committee meets monthly to look over the numbers, checking for any red flags.

Legislator Montgomery requested clarification on the steps for dealing with a mental health crisis.

Dr. Hirko stated they have a 20-bed psychiatric unit which is very busy, handles all adult referrals that are non-forensic, and it constantly remains full. He stated they have a residency and when contacted by the ED (Emergency Department), the resident will go down to ED to see the patient. He stated they have a Crisis Management Team that has multiple members. He stated we would love to have more beds but would need more psychiatrists and staff.

Legislator Montgomery questioned if there is medically assisted addiction treatment in the Emergency Room.

Dr. Hirko stated they have the capability to give patients the first or second dose to take home with them. He noted they are working on other grants with the State to offer more. He stated they have added security in the hospital.

Chairwoman Sayegh thanked Dr. Hirko.

**Item #4 - Approval/ Budgetary Amendment 24A041/Historian/Use Donation Funds to Purchase Civil War Plaque for Putnam County Veterans Park**

Chairwoman Sayegh stated the County received a donation from Mr. George Whipple via the Society of Preservation for Putnam County Antiquities and Greenways, Inc. She stated County Historian Jennifer Cassidy wants to use this to purchase a Civil War plaque to be installed at Veterans Memorial Park on Juneteenth. She said Historian Cassidy's daughter Ellen did a lot of research for this monument. She stated the plaque is for Frank Myers who was born in Patterson, his family lived in Southeast, and he was a local Civil War black veteran. She noted to read about this go to [newyorkalmanack.com](http://newyorkalmanack.com) and look up Frank Myers. She stated hopefully everyone will be able to join us on June 19, 2024.

Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to Approve Budgetary Amendment 24A041; Seconded by Legislator Crowley. All in favor.

**Item #5 - Other Business - None**

**Item #6 – Adjournment**

There being no further business at 7:01PM Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to adjourn;  
Seconded by Legislator Crowley. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Temporary Employee Linda Rinaldi.