



Subject: Physician Recruitment Guideline

To: Council

From: Chief Administrative Office

Report Number: 2021-37

Meeting Date: February 8, 2021

Recommendation:

That Chief Administrative Office Report 2021-37 be received; and

That the Physician Recruitment Guideline in Appendix A of Chief Administrative Office Report 2021-37 be approved.

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to adopt a Physician Recruitment Guideline that will provide incentives for family physicians to locate their practices in Port Colborne in order to address the number of unrostered patients that currently exists in the City.

Background:

For many years, the City of Port Colborne has administered a program to recruit family physicians to the City in response to the shortage of family doctors in the City and the province as a whole.

City Council's commitment to physician recruitment has been demonstrated through:

- Staff support for recruitment and retention efforts through the Health Services Coordinator
- Funding to assist family physicians with relocation costs and financial assistance with the cost of furnishings and equipment for the establishment of new practices
- Support of medical education and retention efforts

Recently the duties of the Health Services Coordinator have been provided through a shared services agreement with the Town of Fort Erie with Fort Erie's Community Health Care Services Coordinator performing the City's Health Services Coordinator's

duties. In 2020, the Fort Erie position became vacant and the City no longer has an agreement for shared services with the Town. Since that time, the City has relied on Niagara Region's full-time Physician Recruiter and intends to continue to do so for recruitment services.

Discussion:

Port Colborne is an underserviced community when it comes to unrostered patients – residents that are not currently on the roster of a family physician. As of October 2020, the eight family physicians located in Port Colborne enroll approximately 9,600 patients. In a community with a population of 18,000 this highlights that 47% of the population either does not have a family doctor or uses services outside of Port Colborne at a walk-in clinic or emergency room. With a physician to population ratio of 1:1,380 it is suggested to have 13 physicians to service the City's population. This is in addition to the succession plan to attract 2-3 physicians to replace those who are within retirement age.

Family Physician Incentives

In order to address the shortage of physicians and unrostered patients in Port Colborne, staff recommend the continuation of the City's Physician Recruitment Program and the use of incentives.

In Ontario, physician recruitment is highly competitive, with communities vying for a limited number of medical graduates. Many municipalities offer recruitment packages to help attract physicians to their communities. To remain progressive and sustainable in physician recruitment, the City has offered financial incentives to attract physicians to the community. This has been done on an ad hoc basis in the absence of a City policy. Staff recommend adopting the attached policy to provide a consistent framework and equitable application each time the City is negotiating with prospective physicians. The draft policy allows staff to negotiate an incentive up to \$75,000 to cover incurred expenses associated with starting or taking over a practice in Port Colborne.

Locum Support Program

From time-to-time, physicians require temporary coverage of absences due to vacancies or illness. In these cases, locum tenens physicians (locum) can fill in the absence. Medical locums with short notice are often difficult to find due to the provincial shortage.

The draft recruitment guidelines provide a Locum Support Program that would support practicing family physicians in the City experiencing an illness or vacancy for any other reason (not including vacations). Staff feel this is an important retention and succession

planning tool that will help bring medical care to patients of eligible physicians when the physician is away from his or her practice.

The proposed guidelines provide a grant of up to 50% of the daily cost of a locum up to a maximum of \$5,000 per calendar year.

Internal Consultations:

The City has a Health Services Committee made up of Council members and members of the public that acts in an advisory capacity to Council. Typically, reports of this type would be discussed at the Health Services Committee's meetings prior to consideration at Council. The City's Health Services Coordinator planned to present an earlier draft version of the proposed policy to the Committee, however, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused the City to suspend the meetings of all sub-committees of Council. Despite the suspended meetings, staff have provided a copy of this report and appendices to the members of the committee and asked for comments to be provided to staff prior to the Council meeting.

Financial Implications:

The City budgeted \$148,000 for Physician recruitment activities in 2021. As a result of the City's utilizing the Niagara Region's full-time physician recruiter the City has saved the cost previously spent on Fort Erie's Community Health Care Services Coordinator making the full balance available for direct program support.

Public Engagement:

The City actively promotes the arrival of new doctors to Port Colborne and helps communicate when doctors are accepting new patients. In the past, the City has maintained a list of unrostered patients and provided the list to doctors that are accepting new patients, but that service is now provided by the Province's Health Care Connect program.

Conclusion:

There is a shortage of family physicians in Port Colborne and a high number of unrostered patients. In order to reduce the number of unrostered patients and attract new physicians to the community, staff recommend implementing the attached Port Colborne Incentive Guideline.

Appendices:

- a. Appendix A – Port Colborne Incentive Guideline (Draft)

Respectfully submitted,

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Report Approval:

All reports reviewed and approved by the Department Director and also the City Treasurer when relevant. Final approval is by the Chief Administrative Officer.