

Partnership makes Purdue HTAP Survey public

Written by

Thursday, 19 March 2009 00:00 - Last Updated Thursday, 19 March 2009 10:22

On Tuesday, March 10, the Washington County Economic Growth Partnership (WCEGP) held a news conference at the Community Learning Center for the express purpose of making public the results of the much awaited Purdue University Healthcare Technical Assistance Program (HTAP) survey for Washington County Memorial Hospital (WCMH). The meeting was attended by Randy Lindauer and Dr. Stephen Kempker representing WCMH, Jerry Rose and Jess Helsel of WCEGP, Rebecca Marshall and Mark Hobson of the Salem Urban Enterprise Zone Board, Commissioner Lana Sullivan, County Council member Dr. Mark Manship and members of the press.

After Helsel gave a brief history of how the HTAP process for WCMH came to be, he said that the community's concerns about the results and the delay on the part of WCMH to release the report were the motivating factors for the WCEGP to make the HTAP information public. At that point, Rose handed out copies of the survey to everyone in attendance. Helsel noted that additional copies would be available for public viewing at the hospital, the Salem Public Library, Pekin Town Hall and Campbellsburg Town Hall. For a summary story of the HTAP survey and results, go to www.gbpnews.com.

Lindauer said that even though the HTAP survey was a well-prepared document it contains several inaccuracies. When asked to be specific about the inaccuracies, Lindauer pointed to issues regarding training of the WCMH Board of Trustees. According to Lindauer, Board members have had extensive training over the years. When pressed to identify other examples of inaccuracies in the survey, Lindauer refused to do so in public but suggested that he would be willing to discuss the matter in private at his office. Lindauer went on to say that overall the HTAP survey was good and that St. Vincent Health is aware of the problems that the survey notes.

After Lindauer completed his remarks, Helsel opened the meeting up to questions. Helsel stated that members of the WCEGP would only answer questions about the mechanics of the HTAP survey but not the results. Those questions would need to be posed to Lindauer and Kempker.

In response to another question about the aforementioned inaccuracies, Kempker seemed to discount the results of the HTAP survey as nothing more than "hearsay" since much of the report was based on interviews with hospital employees, medical staff, patients, and community members. According to Kempker, "they did not actually come in and review our processes as we had hoped they would do." However, a review of the survey seems to indicate that several processes including billing, emergency department, admissions, sanitation and equipment upkeep were the focus of the Purdue HTAP team. Kempker went on to state that "given the current situation on medicine, I don't think the report is appropriate, to be honest."

"There are at least a dozen hospitals (in the state) in as bad of shape, if not worse than ours. Some of them are a lot bigger," said Kempker. "We are currently struggling to overcome a lot of those same problems as those other hospitals are doing."

Kempker went on to compare the results of the HTAP survey to the results that would be expected if people were asked to comment on WCMH in "The Town Crier". Kempker went on to state that the most accurate part of the HTAP survey is that WCMH had not developed or filed a Strategic Plan. (The WCMH Board of Trustees were presented with and approved a proposed Strategic Plan presented by Lindauer on February 26—nearly three weeks after the Purdue HTAP team presented its findings to WCMH and WCEGP.)

Kempker lamented the fact that the HTAP survey became public by saying, "It's bad timing for this comes out, and just merely—practically a smear campaign. This document would not

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stand up in court.”

The accusations that the process used by HTAP was flawed caused Helsel to point out that the Purdue HTAP program has worked with nearly 60 hospitals across the state and that he believes the process used has been well documented and quite thorough.

Later in the meeting, Helsel expressed concerns that several local businesses have indicated to him that WCMH is in arrears on its accounts with them. Helsel asked what message should be given to local vendors. Lindauer responded by saying that he will send a letter to all local vendors that the hospital owes money to. Lindauer then assured all those present that local vendors would be paid in full within 30 to 60 days.

Another question focused on the current state of negotiations with St. Vincent Health (SVH). According to Lindauer and Kempker, SVH is still interested in reaching an agreement with WCMH. However, they indicated that negotiations would take longer than the initial estimate of 180 days stated in Fall 2008.

The meeting concluded with Lindauer saying, “We have a great hospital and Washington County should feel privileged to have such an organization right here in a small community.”