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Physician Recruitment and Retention Task Force to address shortage]

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Hills of Headwaters Collaborative Ontario Health Team (HOHC OHT) has launched a Physician Recruitment and Retention Task Force to address the shortage of primary care physicians in Dufferin County and the Town of Caledon.

An inaugural task force meeting was held last Thursday (Feb. 23), with a number of community leaders and local politicians in attendance. The task force outlined priorities in recruitment and retention of family physicians and aims to work with government and community stakeholders in creating a plan to improve the way the community receives care.

?We are thrilled to be part of the Task Force, acknowledging the important connection between primary care physicians, specialists and community partners in providing care to people across our communities,? said Annette Jones, co-chair of HOHC OHT. ?We see the benefits of a connected approach to encouraging health care providers to choose our region as their preferred place to practice. Our community has so much to offer.?

The task force's goal is to initially focus on recruiting family physicians, with the objective of expanding its work to recruiting other health care providers and specialists to serve the community better.

?We know that having a regular care provider greatly improves health outcomes, reduces mortality, decrease hospitalizations and reduces healthcare costs. We look forward to working with HOHC OHT and other community stakeholders to address this shortage and ensure equitable access the health care is available to everyone in our community,? said Orangeville Mayor Lisa Post.

In the last few months, there have been significant changes in the number of family physicians serving the Dufferin and Caledon area, with physicians moving their practices elsewhere, retiring or ceasing to practice altogether. The shortage has increased the number of patients seeking emergency care and urgent care clinics.

According to data from the Hills of Headwaters Collaborative Ontario Health Team (HOHC OHT), there are more than 4,000 people in the Dufferin and Caledon area who do not have a family physician. This accounts for about 5.3 per cent of the Dufferin-Caledon population.

?About one in 20 people within our OHT geographic catchment area don't have regular access to a primary care physician,? said Lianne Barbour, executive director of Dufferin Area Family Health Team and co-chair of HOHC OHT. ?As we work to improve the continuum of care in the community, it is critical that we address these concerns as a community, bringing together leaders across both Dufferin and Caledon who are committed to both attracting and keeping local family physicians.?

The task force estimates that 14 more primary care physicians are needed in Dufferin and 29 more in Caledon by 2031 in order to meet the needs of the communities.

For more information on the work being done by HOHC OHT, visit www.hillsofheadwaterscollaborative.ca.