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Task force established to address doctor shortage in Caledon and Dufferin]

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As Dufferin County grows, more primary care physicians will be needed to care for the region's increased population. The same applies for Caledon.

On March 5, the Hills of Headwaters Collaborative Ontario Health Team (HOHC OHT) announced it had launched a ?Physician Recruitment and Retention Task Force? to work on strategies to bring new physicians to the area and ?address the shortage of primary care physicians in the Town of Caledon and Dufferin County.?

There are over 4,000 people in Caledon and Dufferin who do not have a family physician, according to HOHC OHT data. That amounts to about 5.3 per cent of the area's population.

Lianne Barbour, executive director of the Dufferin Area Family Health Team, put those stats in perspective, explaining about one in 20 people in Caledon and Dufferin don't have regular access to a primary care physician.

?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,? said Barbour.

The first meeting of the task force took place on February 23 and brought together local politicians and community leaders. The first meeting served to outline priorities in a plan to improve the way residents in Caledon and Dufferin receive care.

According to the HOHC OHT, in the first few months of 2023 there's been family physicians moving their practices elsewhere, retiring, or ceasing to practice in Caledon and Dufferin. It said this will increase the number of patients seeking emergency care and urgent care clinics, compounding already high pressures those clinics are already facing.

The Physician Recruitment and Retention Task Force estimates that 29 more primary care physicians will be needed in Caledon, and 14 more in Dufferin, by the year 2031 in order to meet community needs.

Mayor Annette Groves said the Town of Caledon is pleased to be working with the HOHC OHT on the task force and said with collaboration, great things can happen.

?Access to local physicians is important for the health of Caledon and as a team we can better address the shortage of family physicians we are experiencing,? said Groves. ?The task force will look at our current providers and how we can support them, identify new opportunities, look at gaps, (and look at how we can attract new providers and support them). I look forward to the team's collaboration for solutions and support.?

Lisa Post, Mayor of the Town of Orangeville, said her Town is looking forward to working with the task force as well to address the physician shortage and ensure health care is available to everyone in Dufferin and Caledon.

?We know that having a regular care provider greatly improves health outcomes, reduces mortality, decreases hospitalizations and reduces healthcare costs,? said Post.

Annette Jones, co-chair of the HOHC OHT, said the communities of Caledon and Dufferin have so much to offer and that she sees the benefits to a connected approach to encouraging health care practitioners to choose the area to practice in.

The task force will first focus on recruiting family physicians, but will then expand to recruit specialists and other types of health care providers.

To learn more about the task force and the HOHC OHT, those interested can visit hillsofheadwaterscollaborative.ca.