

Municipality Of Chatham-Kent

Community Human Services

Public Health Unit

Information Report

To: Mayor and Members of Council
From: Teresa Bendo, Director, Public Health
Date: January 7, 2019
Subject: Physician Recruitment and Retention

This report is for the information of Council.

Background

At the December 10, 2018 Council meeting, Councillor Thompson put forward the following notice of motion:

“Whereas the rate of general/primary care physicians in Chatham-Kent is 76.9 per 100,000 population, which is lower than the Erie St. Clair LHIN (92.5 per 100,000), which is lower than the province (109.4/100,000); and

Whereas in 2018, Chatham-Kent had approximately 65 primary practice physicians and of these primary practice physicians 25% were between the ages of 55 and 64 and another 17% were 65 and older; and

Whereas 62% of primary practice physicians practice in the city of Chatham; and

Whereas despite 94.8% of Chatham City Centre residents and 97.2% of Rural Kent residents, aged 16 and older, reported having a primary care provider (a family doctor, general practitioner, or nurse practitioner), in 2017 46% of Chatham City Centre and 58.5% of Rural Kent residents reported that their emergency room visit was for a condition that could have been managed by their primary care provider, had that provider been available; and

Whereas current data is not available on resident satisfaction with the location of their primary care practitioner in relation to where they live, anecdotal data continues to have residents seeking a primary care practitioner in their local community.

Therefore be it resolved that administration work with the Erie St. Clair LHIN to reinstate a primary care practitioner recruitment and retention program for Chatham-Kent and that \$100,000 be submitted to the 2019 budget in support of this program.”

At the December 17, 2018 Council meeting, the motion by Councillor Thompson was amended, directing administration to work with the three Family Health Care Teams in Chatham-Kent to reinstate a primary care practitioner recruitment and retention program. And that an upside limit of \$100,000 be submitted to the 2019 budget in support of this program and also encourage the Erie St. Clair LHIN to provide financial support. The amended motion was approved.

Historical timeline of Municipal Involvement in Physician Recruitment:

In 1999, the Chatham-Kent Physician Recruitment and Retention Committee was formed to aggressively support the activities of physician recruitment groups within Chatham-Kent. Membership was made up of representatives from Council, Health and Family Services, Economic Development, the Chatham-Kent Health Alliance, Human Resource Development Canada, the Southwestern Ontario Medical Education Network of Western University and individual community recruitment committees.

In June of 2002, the committee was successful in applying for a Rural Economic Development Grant. The initial funding from HRDC was \$126,420 and was matched by the Municipality.

By March 2004, the Municipality had replaced the HRDC as the main funder (85%) with Chatham-Kent Health Alliance contributing the remaining funds (15%). At the conclusion of the project in December 2006, over 30 physicians had been recruited.

In January of 2005, with the direction of Council, the Health Unit hired a nurse practitioner to assist with primary care in the community. At that time of hire, nurse practitioners were not admissible expenses through public health funding, and as such, the position was resourced through municipal funding. As the nurse practitioner role evolved, it eventually migrated to a cost-shared position.

In 2015, the MOHLTC implemented a new funding formula for public health units and as a result, the budget of the Chatham-Kent Public Health Unit, along with 27 other public health units, was frozen.

In August of 2016, the nurse practitioner position was eliminated for three key reasons: the frozen budget, the nurse practitioner role was not a core public health function, and data at the time indicated Chatham-Kent was not considered to be an underserved area.

The Chatham-Kent Health Alliance was funded by the Community Partnership Fund-Core Grant Program \$100,000 a year for 2014, 2015, and 2016 to recruit community physicians. At the end of 2016 Council supported administration's recommendation to stop this funding and transfer the funds from the core grant program to Community Attraction and Leisure Services (CALs) for overall community talent recruitment.

Comments

Current Situation:

A number of organizations and individuals were contacted to provide information regarding the current physician recruitment and retention situation in Chatham-Kent.

Healthforce Ontario Marketing and Recruitment Agency

Currently, the only lever the LHIN has to influence physician recruitment is the MOHLTC's Areas of High Physician Need list, accessible at the following web link: <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/highneed/> . Through this list, the MOHLTC can identify areas that are in need of physicians. These are the only areas that Family Health Organizations (FHO) may add additional physicians or physicians may start new FHOs. According to the Areas of High Physician Need list, Chatham-Kent, including all towns within Chatham-Kent do not qualify as an area of high physician need.

The role of Regional Advisors at Healthforce Ontario is to work collaboratively with communities and health-care employers throughout the physician recruitment process, including marketing, onboarding, retention and succession planning.

Health Care Connect

Health Care Connect refers Ontarians without a physician to a family health care provider who may be accepting new patients. Unattached patients can call or go online at the following web link www.ontario.ca/healthcareconnect to register with the program.

Once registered, program participants are assigned to a Care Connector. Care Connectors, who are nurses employed by the LHIN, will work with primary care physicians and nurse practitioners who are accepting new patients. There is an approximate 95% match rate.

Local Health Integration Network (LHIN)

In addition to identifying challenges to recruitment and retention of physicians, the LHIN identified some other issues that should be addressed moving forward:

- Individuals looking for a primary care practitioner do not know who is accepting patients and are unaware of how to register with Health Care Connect to be matched with a physician or primary care practitioner;
- Patients have provided feedback regarding access to their physician including, that their physician is not in the town in which they live, there is limited access to their physician after hours, and their physician is one gender but they prefer to be seen by another gender physician; and
- Some of the community's most vulnerable, complex needs, and difficult to serve patients do not have primary care physicians. These patients remain difficult to match despite there being open primary care spaces.

Chatham-Kent Community Health Centre (CHC)

Currently the Chatham-Kent Community Health Centre is at full capacity, and is not experiencing a physician recruitment issue. While there has been some physician turnover, they have been able to recruit quickly and there is no anticipated turnover in the near future. As a LHIN-funded agency, their complement is set by the Ministry of Health and Long-term Care (MOHLTC) at a total of 5.0 full time equivalents (FTE) for the three locations in Chatham-Kent (Chatham, Wallaceburg, Walpole Island). The CHC does not have funding to hire additional physicians.

Tilbury Family Health Team (FHT)

The Tilbury Family Health Team currently employs seven physicians, six of whom currently have a full practice. The seventh physician is currently taking patients and placing them on a waitlist as he transitions patients into his practice. The FHT's family health organization agreement allows only seven FTE physicians, so currently they are unable to add additional physicians.

Chatham-Kent Family Health Team

The Chatham-Kent Family Health Team is currently actively recruiting physicians. The FHT recently hired a Director, Medical Recruitment. They are recruiting for physicians at each of their five sites (Chatham, Wallaceburg, Blenheim, Dresden and Ridgetown). Currently they have 22-23 physicians but could add 10-12 physicians to fill vacancies and prepare for potential retirements.

Thamesview Family Health Team

Currently the Thamesview Family Health Team is at full capacity for primary care physicians. This is in large part due to their very successful residency program for medical students/residents from Schulich School of Medicine of Western University. Approximately two thirds of those who have been in the program have stayed to practice in Chatham-Kent.

Unattached Physicians

There are four primary care physicians in Chatham-Kent who are not affiliated with a Family Health Team, but are part of a Family Health Group. These physicians have large rosters and may or may not have a succession plan in place for their retirement.

FHGs can add physicians at any time, regardless of whether a community is on the high needs list or not. As this is mainly a fee for service model, income stabilization is not needed for this payment model.

Chatham-Kent Health Alliance (CKHA)

Due to the timing of this report, Chatham-Kent Health Alliance was not able to be contacted for comments. However, on Oct 17 2018, Chatham Daily News published an

article titled “CKHA Doc Recruitment Strategy Working Well” that outlined the success CKHA has recently had in recruiting physicians to the Alliance. Input will be sought from CKHA as needed. This article can be found at the following web link:

<https://www.chathamdailynews.ca/news/local-news/ckha-doc-recruitment-strategy-working-well>

Community Attraction and Leisure Services (CALs), Municipality of Chatham-Kent

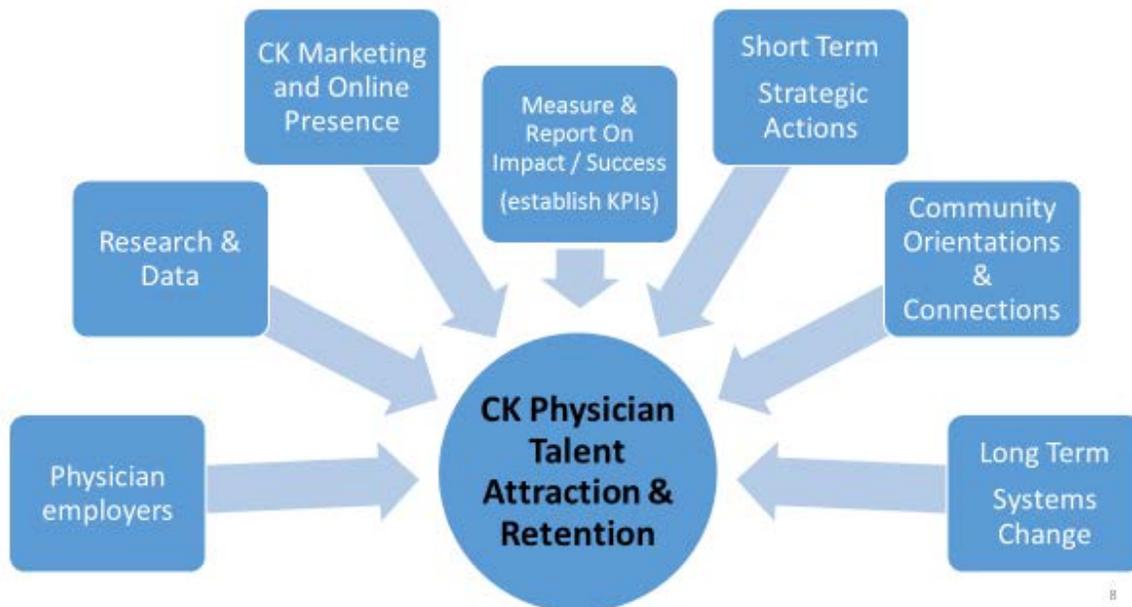
In line with employers across Canada, Chatham-Kent employers from across a broad range of sectors have identified workforce shortages as a key challenge facing their business operations. This challenge is particularly pressing in the face of an ageing workforce and population.

Talent Attraction and Retention is a key strategic issue for Chatham-Kent employers, spans many sectors and professions, and is an issue that employers are eager to address. For those employers not yet challenged by workforce shortages, succession planning will likely start to feature in business planning.

The Municipality of Chatham-Kent’s Community Attraction and Leisure Services area has supported the development of a Talent Attraction Strategy, which can be rolled out as a framework for addressing talent attraction responses.

Key to the framework are employers - they are central to any strategy to find and keep talent. The Municipality of Chatham-Kent, through its Community Human Services area (including, Community Attraction and Promotion, CK Workforce Planning Board, Employment and Social Services) and Community Development area (Economic Development Services) can be seen as a key supporter of all initiatives to attract and retain talent such that employers are supported by a range of community stakeholders.

Applying the Talent Attraction framework to Physician Recruitment (figure below), the employers would include all those engaged in attracting, retaining and supporting physicians and their families in Chatham-Kent. If Council and the community support moving forward in this direction, CALs will provide the municipal support to bring together municipal departments and key community partners.

Components of Physician Talent Attraction

This group of physician employers spearheading the initiative would include all those who directly employ and seek to retain physicians and their families, including but not limited to:

- Chatham-Kent Family Health Team
- Thamesview Family Health Team
- Tilbury Family Health Team
- Chatham-Kent Health Alliance
- Chatham-Kent Community Health Centre

And would be supported by;

- Erie St Clair LHIN
- Healthforce Ontario
- Municipality of Chatham-Kent, Community Attraction and Promotion
- Chatham-Kent Workforce Planning Board
- Municipality of Chatham-Kent Economic Development

The group would come together to discuss the components of the Talent Attraction framework and would identify collaborative actions based on issues identified.

Emerging Themes

The following are themes that have arisen from the above consultation:

Roster Size

Older physicians tend to have larger rosters. As these physicians retire it will likely require more than one physician to replace the retiree.

Succession Planning

Forty-two percent of primary care physicians are over 55 years of age. While currently only one FHT is having difficulty recruiting physicians, all organizations are mindful of the potential for retirements and recognise the need for not only individual organization succession plans, but also a collaborative approach to ensuring succession planning within and across the system.

Retention

Retention of physicians is as important as recruitment. Showing appreciation to new physicians, building connections with them and their families, actively supporting physicians and local health facilities, maintaining and improving local physical/recreational amenities, and nurturing reciprocal rapport with physicians all continue to be important in retaining new physicians.

Needs of physicians

The needs of physicians are changing:

- Many are looking for a balance of work and family commitments and generally smaller caseloads than many of Chatham-Kent's current physicians,
- There may be difficulty recruiting full time primary care physicians. Graduates are more and more looking for diversity in their role. For example, in addition to primary care, part time opportunities as hospitalists, in emergency room (to maintain clinical competencies), or a passion for geriatrics as a house doctor at a long term care home are important considerations for new physicians,
- Many graduates are looking for opportunities for team-based care which may lead to difficulty in recruiting for 'unattached' physician retirements, and
- Chatham-Kent does not have a tertiary care centre for those physicians who want to specialize in specific areas of health care.

Political Uncertainties

The Ontario Medical Association is currently in contract negotiations with the provincial government. Physicians have been without a contract for more than five years. Results of negotiations may impact primary care payment models in the province.

Additionally, Premier Ford has signaled that improving health care, continuing Ontario's jobs boom, and "balancing the budget in a responsible manner" will be his government's top priorities this year.

Consultation

Consultation to produce this report occurred with:

- Manager, Community Attraction and Promotion, Municipality of Chatham-Kent
- Manager, Tenant Relations, Housing Services, Municipality of Chatham-Kent
- Director, LHIN Sub-Region, Chatham-Kent, Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network
- Executive Director, Tilbury District Family Health Team
- Executive Director, Chatham-Kent Family Health Team
- Director of Communication, Public Affairs, and Organizational Development, Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network
- Executive Director, Chatham-Kent Community Health Centres
- Regional Advisor - South West, Community Supports, HealthForceOntario Marketing and Recruitment Agency
- Executive Director, Thamesview Family Health Team

While gathering information for the completion of this report, it became evident that as with any new employee or resident, physicians need to feel welcomed and part of the community. Only one Family Health Team is currently experiencing vacancies and is actively recruiting. All agencies recognize the need for succession planning and while some are willing to work together for an overall recruitment and retention strategy, most indicate that before any investment is made, the group should determine what the current issues are, review past experiences to determine what worked well and what didn't and review best practices from the field before determining what might work now. The collective felt it was premature to hire someone in a physician recruitment role without some of this preliminary work being completed first however acknowledge that resources may be needed to move a recruitment and retention strategy forward.

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications resulting from this report.

Prepared by:

Teresa Bendo, MBA
Director, Public Health

Reviewed by:

April Rietdyk, RN, BScN, MHS, PHD PUBH
General Manager
Community Human Services

Consulted and confirmed the content of the consultation section of the report by:

Audrey Ansell
Manager
Community Attraction and Promotion

Kristen Williams
Manager, Tenant Relations
Housing Services

Attachment: None

C: Audrey Ansell, Manager, Community Attraction and Promotion, Municipality of Chatham-Kent

Rashoo Brar, Director, LHIN Sub-Region, Chatham-Kent, Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network

Kelly Griffiths, Executive Director, Tilbury District Family Health Team

Laura Johnson, Executive Director, Chatham-Kent Family Health Team

Shannon Sasseville, Director of Communication, Public Affairs, and Organizational Development, Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network

Sherri Saunders, Executive Director, Chatham-Kent Community Health Centres

Jane Tillman, Regional Advisor - South West, Community Supports, HealthForceOntario Marketing and Recruitment Agency

Denise Waddick, Executive Director, Thamesview Family Health Team

Kristen Williams, Manager, Tenant Relations, Housing Services, Municipality of Chatham-Kent

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