

Argus-Courier - Health--care board balks at doctors' proposal

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## **HEALTH-CARE BOARD BALKS AT DOCTORS' PROPOSAL GROUP WANTS \$120,000 FOR RECRUITMENT OF PHYSICIANS**

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Irked over a perceived lack of specificity and accountability, the Petaluma Health Care District board members balked at a proposal to provide \$120,000 to representatives of the South Sonoma County Medical Group so that it can manage and facilitate the recruitment, hiring and integration of primary-care physicians in the area.

"I understand that there's an urgency, but many weeks ago, we asked for specific details," said board member David Anderson at a meeting Thursday. "I don't see a business rigor in the proposal that we have held the Petaluma Health Center to. We need to see specific timetables and exactly how this money would help."

Anderson's remarks were directed at Dr. Bob Ostroff, president of the SSCMG, and consultant Wayne Fairchild, the former vice president of operations at Petaluma Valley Hospital. When Ostroff and Fairchild presented a draft of a proposal at the health care district's board meeting in August requesting \$120,000 for the first step and an additional \$500,000 for two additional steps to boost physician recruitment and retention, they were asked to supply more details.

"We offered to provide funds for a business consultant to help put together a very detailed, well-documented business plan because we didn't think it was fair to ask Bob and Wayne to come up with one themselves," Anderson said. "They didn't use a consultant, though, and what they came up with is not good enough for me."

"We went on the premise that the proposal that we wrote is what you wanted," Fairchild replied.

The proposal requests \$36,000 to manage and facilitate the integration of insurance plans and other health care products into the area served by the health care district; \$36,000 to manage and facilitate the recruitment and retention of two or three primary care physicians; and \$48,000 to work with key providers to broaden the scope of health care in the area by creating health centers and possibly recruiting specialist physicians.

“How will the goals be met?” asked board member Kay Kerriden. “I’m concerned about spending more money, and then not seeing any improvement.”

“I feel uncomfortable using public money without having more specifics,” said Robert Hill, president of the board.

“We need a business plan,” said board member Liz Close. “We need to have an expectation for every single dime spent, because we’re accountable for the public’s money. The vision has to be translated into nuts and bolts.”

Ostroff and Fairchild agreed to utilize a consultant to create a more detailed proposal.

“It may take 60 to 90 days,” said Fairchild, who said he knew of a consultant that he planned to contact.

Board members also seemed uncomfortable that the proposal gave no indication that the SSCMG would cooperate with St. Joseph Health System of Sonoma County in trying to meet its expressed goals.

“I’m concerned about the relations between the SSCMG and St. Joseph, which are poor at best,” Anderson said. “This could undermine efforts to create something positive, so we need to make the parties in this relationship accountable.”

Kerriden alluded to the SSCMG’s desire to create a new health care model to better support physicians.

“Physician recruitment could be difficult even with a good model unless relations improve,” Kerriden said. “I’m happy that a physicians’ group formed, but don’t think that it alone can determine the health care needs of this community.”

Close pointed out that the proposal was being presented amid a conflict between some SSCMG doctors and health care district board members over physicians’ plan to open a new surgery center at 1304 Southpoint Blvd.

“You’re asking for this funding while you’re in an adversarial situation with us over the surgery center,” she said. “For the board to trust the SSCMG, the SSCMG needs to trust the board.”

“We all need to make a plan together, and trust one another.”

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