

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 25, 2020



After-hours clinic winding down and doctor recruitment ramping up

Wasaga Beach – After a successful trial period of more than a year the Wasaga Beach After-Hours Medical Clinic is closing and the municipality is shifting its focus to doctor recruitment.

Tuesday night, council directed staff to discontinue the clinic, effective April 1, and concentrate on attracting doctors to the community.

The best long-term approach to meeting the needs of patients is additional family physicians in Wasaga Beach.

“The more physicians we can recruit to our community the greater number of people we can roster with a doctor,” Mayor Nina Bifulchi said. “The clinic is a nice service but it is expensive, not a core municipal service, and it doesn’t address the primary need of our town and that is more doctors. We are taking steps to change the landscape. In recent months, two physicians have established practices in Wasaga Beach and we anticipate that trend continuing as we move forward with recruitment.”

The after-hours clinic launched in November 2018. The intent was to determine if there was a need for the clinic and, if so, would the local Family Health Organization (FHO) take over the operation. The FHO is a group of approximately 50 physicians in the area that provide primary care to residents of Wasaga Beach, Collingwood and the surrounding townships.

Since its inception, the clinic operated on a collaborative basis with local doctors and nurse practitioners providing the care. The clinic ran from space at the South Georgian Bay Community Health Centre. The town provided reception staff and the FHO facilitated access to medical records.

Community partners kept in regular contact during the after-hours trial. In November 2019, after one year, partners reviewed the statistics and determined that based on use the clinic was a success.

Talks moved to whether the FHO was interested in taking over the clinic. The FHO began a consultation with its membership.

In December 2019, council agreed to extend the clinic to the end of March to allow the FHO to complete its review. The town also started consultation with the province to see if funding was available to support the clinic.

But the FHO advised the town in mid-February its members were not able to take on the additional work. There has been no indication from the province that funding for the clinic is available. The town invested considerable funds into the operation of the clinic, having spent roughly \$250,000 plus start-up costs.

“We recognize our doctors are not able to take over the clinic as their own,” Mayor Bifulchi said. “And we also realize it is not responsible long-term to use town funds to operate the clinic, either by paying doctors an attendance fee or by funding nurse practitioners. Our best options are to pursue funding from the province and attract physicians to our community.”

On behalf of council, the mayor thanks all members in the medical community for their support of the after-hours project.

“Your commitment to our town is truly commendable and we are grateful for your effort during this exercise,” she said.

Mayor Bifulchi paid special tribute to Dr. Harry O’Halloran, FHO lead physician.

“Dr. O’Halloran played a key role since the inception of the clinic. I thank him for his guidance and diligence as we navigated our way through this period. He is a credit to his profession and we look forward to continued good relations with Dr. O’Halloran and all members of the FHO,” Mayor Bifulchi said.

With the focus now on doctor recruitment, the town has budgeted \$30,000 for this year to assist in attracting physicians to the community.

Already, staff are in high-level talks with physicians interested in coming to Wasaga Beach and these discussions will continue in the months ahead.

Last week, staff attended the Rural Ontario Medical Retreat at Blue Mountain and interacted with new physicians looking to set up practice.

The town will update the community on recruitment efforts going forward.

Background

Read a related staff report about the clinic here: [CAO Report to council](#)

Read a report about activity at the clinic in January here: [January activity](#)

For media requiring additional information, please contact:

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