

**HEALTH, SOCIAL, EDUCATIONAL & ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD IN ROOM #318
PUTNAM COUNTY OFFICE BUILDING
CARMEL, NEW YORK 10512**

Chairwoman Sayegh, Legislators Addonizio & Jonke

Tuesday

6:30PM

March 8, 2022

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 P.M. by Chairwoman Sayegh who requested that Legislator Addonizio lead in the Pledge of Allegiance. Upon roll call Legislators Addonizio, Jonke and Chairwoman Sayegh were present.

Item #3 - Discussion/Update/Putnam Hospital Center/Suspension of Labor & Delivery Services/PHC President Dr. Mark Hirko

Chairwoman Sayegh thanked Dr. Hirko for attending and noted that the Hospital has been very responsive to the Legislature.

Dr. Hirko stated the Hospital had a Community Forum last week and Nuvance has made the commitment to developing the Hospital for the future. He stated they are looking at strategic growth through services. He stated they are excited to work with the community. He stated they are currently meeting with their physician leadership, clinical staff, and Nuvance leadership to move forward with development. He stated a focus they have is women's health. He stated the Labor and Delivery Services were temporarily suspended after the CareMount Labor and Delivery Physicians indicated that they would be moving on. He stated they are actively recruiting Obstetricians and are looking at alternative models of care for Labor and Delivery. He stated they had to be prepared for potential emergency labor situations and planned coordinated seamless care. He stated they know that the Emergency Room (ER) is not an adequate substitute for Labor and Delivery. He stated they are ensuring that each physician and nurse in the ER has Labor and Delivery training. He stated they anticipate and hope to reestablish the Labor and Delivery Unit in the near future. He stated the Hospital is looking to retool and potentially renovate that area. He stated they are hoping to turn this into a positive.

Chairwoman Sayegh noted that Dr. Hirko spoke with herself and Legislator Jonke in June 2021. She questioned if there is a reason the relationship with CareMount ended.

Dr. Hirko clarified that the relationship has not ended, and they are still partnering. He stated over 80% of patients at Putnam Hospital are CareMount patients. He stated the majority of the physicians at Putnam Hospital are CareMount physicians. He stated Putnam Hospital has a strong relationship with CareMount but will work to fill in the gaps.

Legislator Nacerino questioned how patients will be transitioned to new Obstetricians or Gynecologists.

Dr. Hirko stated they will grow primary care. He noted that CareMount does not have all of the patients in the area. He stated this changeover will take time. He stated CareMount's pre and post-natal care will still be at Putnam Hospital.

Legislator Castellano stated he has only heard good things about the Labor and Delivery services at Putnam Hospital. He questioned what the goal is for when these services will be resumed.

Dr. Hirko stated it is hard to say but he hopes within a year. He stated it will be about finding the right balance. He stated they will also look into potentially providing alternative care such as mid-wives and doulas.

Legislator Gouldman questioned if there are any plans for additional services on the west side of the County.

Dr. Hirko stated they are looking at the entire area. He reiterated that they are hoping to grow their primary care.

Legislator Gouldman questioned if there are plans to open a facility in the Putnam Valley area.

Dr. Hirko stated they are in the early stages of looking at what they want to do. He stated they recognize that the days of having a "single house" as a practice site are no longer the best option. He stated because of the pandemic, they have become very efficient with telehealth and that is an area that could be expanded.

Legislator Gouldman clarified that Putnam Hospital would compete with Northern Westchester Medical Center.

Dr. Hirko stated yes, they will do what makes sense for the community.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated Putnam Hospital is one of the largest employers in Putnam County. She questioned how future plans will affect the staffing.

Dr. Hirko stated they have committed to ensuring that people do not lose their jobs. He stated there has been issues with staff leaving. He stated there was a period of time with almost 40% of the health system was either ill or out. He stated this is why there were very long wait times. He stated now they are starting to rebound with many staff coming back and well as the number of patients stabilizing. He stated it is difficult to add staff when every hospital is also looking to do the same. He noted an instance when, in a single nursing unit, there was a staff member that took vacation, a staff member who was injured, and a staff member who contracted COVID. He stated the unit went from fully staffed to half staffed in 24 hours. He stated they are actively recruiting and 18% of their job openings are nursing. He stated it is going to take time.

Legislator Albano questioned why the Labor and Delivery Physicians left.

Dr. Hirko stated there are many reasons. He stated it is one of the hardest jobs. He stated since Putnam Hospital does not have a NICU (newborn intensive care unit) so they tend to treat lower risk patients.

Legislator Addonizio stated she understands that many many staff members were let go due to the vaccine mandate and questioned how that will be handled in the future.

Dr. Hirko stated not many were fired. He stated out of 13,000 employees, 28 were let go.

Legislator Addonizio questioned how it will be handled if those people could be rehired.

Dr. Hirko stated Putnam Hospital must follow the State Law.

Legislator Jonke thanked Dr. Hirko for attending and this information. He questioned if the nursing shortage is still as bad as it was when Dr. Hirko attended the Health Committee meeting in November 2021.

Dr. Hirko stated there has been an increase in hiring, but 2,000 openings still remain. He stated they are losing people as fast as they are hiring. He stated new hires are being overwhelmed from the start. He stated they are getting better at helping these new hires over the initial hump.

Legislator Jonke again thanked Dr. Hirko and stated he and the people who work for him have difficult jobs. He stated the Legislature would like to help in any way.

Dr. Hirko stated as they continue to look at potential paths forward, they will include the County in those discussions.

Chairwoman Sayegh stated the floor would be opened up to questions or comments from the public.

Carmel Resident Carol Casey stated she has been a nurse for 38 years with the last 22 years being at Putnam Hospital. She stated she is worried about what is going to happen to the women in this area. She stated there are many nights that she has to go down to the emergency room to help because a woman came in while in labor and nobody in the emergency room knows what to do. She questioned what will happen when there are no nurses there to help or if there is a sick baby. She stated the couple of hours of training that they are currently providing is not sufficient. She stated we are talking about babies and womens lives. She stated she is hoping that the Legislature will push for Nuvance to get Labor and Delivery Doctors back in to Putnam Hospital soon. She stated her worry that this could lead to losses of life. She stated things went very well before Nuvance took over. She stated the nurses knew that taking the Neonatologist away was a bad idea, but the Nuvance did it. She stated this is why the CareMount Labor and Delivery Doctors left. She stated the nurses want the best for the community.

Legislator Jonke stated it has been 14 years since his daughter was born at Putnam Hospital. He stated it upsets him that the Labor and Delivery Unit is being temporarily closed. He praised the Putnam Hospital staff.

Legislator Albano echoed Legislator Jonke's praise of Putnam Hospital.

Chairwoman Sayegh thanked everyone for their participation. She stated she appreciates the responsiveness of the Hospital Leadership.

Item #4 - Other Business - None

Item #5 – Adjournment

There being no further business, at 7:07 P.M., Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to adjourn; Seconded by Legislator Addonizio. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Administrative Assistant Ed Gordon.