

MINUTES of the SPECIAL MEETING
of the BOARD of COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
of SAN MIGUEL COUNTY, NEW MEXICO
HELD OCTOBER 12, 2023 AT 5:30 PM

SMC HealthCare Study & Planning Committee

1. CALL TO ORDER

The San Miguel County Healthcare Study Group held a special meeting on Thursday, 12th of October 2023 at 5:30 PM at New Mexico Highlands University Student Center located at 800 National Avenue, Las Vegas, New Mexico 87701. Harold Garcia called the meeting to order at 5:42 PM.

2. ROLL CALL

Roll call was not taken. A sign-in sheet was used.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Harold Garcia asked for the approval of the agenda – no changes needed.

Motion to approve Agenda made by Barbara Perea-Casey. Second by Yolanda Ulmer. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS

4. WELCOME & DISCUSSION OF THE PURCHASE OF ALTA VISTA REGIONAL HOSPITAL

Dr. Timothy Jessie, General Surgeon - Rural Surgical Associates: A colleague of Dr. Humberto Martinez; they rotate to be here to accommodate general surgeries on patients. Dr. Jessie has been in practice for 19 years and has been working in Las Vegas since December 2022. Very interested in the future of Alta Vista Regional and moving things forward.

Dr. Mital Patel, MD - Alta Vista Regional Hospital: Re-introduction (refer to SM-09-20-2023 minutes).

Stella Burciaga, Owner – Buena Vida Physical Therapy & Wellness: Re-introduction (refer to SM-09-20-2023 minutes)

Phillip Martinez, President – Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce: Offered his support for the committee by advertising for what the committee is working towards.

Kimberly Vigil, Long-Term Care Administrator – La Vida Buena (formerly known as Vida Encantada): Has been working at this facility for 4.5 years, but has been a nursing home administrator for 10 years, born and raised in Las Vegas. The facility recently got bought out and things seem to be going downhill. Ms. Vigil owns Sunshine Home Health, which has been her passion.

Robert Nelson, Interim CEO & Chief Nursing Officer – Alta Vista Regional Hospital: Re-introduction (refer to SM-09-20-2023 minutes).

Yolanda Ulmer, Vice-President – District 1199: Mentioned how District 1199 has had a lot of issues with corporate not wanting to give back to their employees or the community, they are looking forward to working with the new company. Ms. Ulmer has heard that the morale at the hospital is improving.

Matt Martinez, Owner – KNMX Radio: Served as Mayor of Las Vegas, City Councilor, been on local, state and national boards. Voiced concerns about healthcare in the community, he allowed the Legion drive to be constructed on his property that was donated by his family. Mr. Martinez was Mayor at the time that the non-profit hospital was waiting on the Attorney General's Office to sign off on the paperwork so the for-profit hospital could take it over, going back to a non-profit is a concern for him. A question Mr. Martinez has is how much will the local community be involved with the new entity? Mr. Martinez stated it is time to concentrate on the local community.

Barbara Perea-Casey, City Councilor – City of Las Vegas: A native Las Vegas who is very concerned about the healthcare issues in San Miguel County and surrounding areas. She was a school Superintendent just outside of Roswell, and started a school based clinic that is still there. Mrs. Perea-Casey was Chair of the San Miguel Family & Community Health Council for 20 years and a member of the council for 22 years. She is also on the Executive Board for the Health Security Campaign where they are working on putting together legislation to ensure all persons have insurance regardless of status and working with the Legislative Health & Human Services Committee and will be introducing some legislations during this upcoming legislative session and working with several entities through the office of the Superintendent of Insurance of New Mexico to lower insurance costs, pharmaceuticals and provide better services in hospitals state-wide.

David Romero, City Councilor – City of Las Vegas: Has been on the City Council for 5 years, the school board for 8 years. Mr. Romero stated that healthcare in the community is very important, and the lack of services is concerning.

Pat Leahan, Director – Las Vegas Peace of Justice Center: Re-introduction (refer to SM-09-20-2023 minutes). Spoke on the importance on having an OB at the hospital to avoid deaths.

Michael Lopez, Owner – Dr. Lopez Family Practice: Re-introduction (refer to SM-09-20-2023 minutes). Dr. Lopez mentioned his concern about the community having a medical staff of 26 people in private practice 20 years ago, and now it is down to 3. He is hopeful that medical staff will build with the changes that are happening.

Dr. Teddi Swidinsky, MD – Alta Vista Regional Hospital: Has been a Surgeon at Alta Vista since January 2021 since then she has partnered with Dr. William Brainerd and wife Dr. Nancy Wright and purchased the old Nelson Funerals Home building where they plan on performing non-hospital type surgeries. Dr. Swidinsky is hopeful with this new change at the hospital. She expressed the desperate need for women's health in the community and the entire state.

Edward Sena, Medical Community & Local Resident: Re-introduction (refer to SM-09-20-2023 minutes).

Kenny Medina, Commissioner – San Miguel County: Re-introduction (refer to SM-09-20-2023 minutes). Expressed his concerns for low income families and the elderly in our community, and would like to hear suggestions from everyone during these meetings to help resolve the issues.

Joe Lupica, Chairman – Newpoint Healthcare Advisors: Is hopeful with the new ownership of the hospital, having more detailed KPI's (key performance indicators) by the next healthcare meeting to give over to the new owner and let them know what the community is expending of them. Mr. Lupica introduced his staff that attended via Zoom, Stephen Shou, Brett Norell & Caroline Michiels.

Robert Seigel, Owner – Rural Surgical Associates: Introduced staff that attended via Zoom, Annissa Apodaca whom started the business with him back in 2017 and Dr. Humberto Martinez.

Annissa Apodaca, Director of Operations – Rural Surgical Associates: Re-introduction (refer to SM-09-20-2023 minutes).

Harold Garcia, Chairman – San Miguel County: Spoke briefly about the importance of regional (San Miguel County, Guadalupe County and Mora County) effort to help get the hospital going.

5. PLANNING AHEAD FOR NEW HOSPITAL

Christina Rivas-Campos, San Miguel County Liaison: Re-introduction (refer to SM-09-20-2023 minutes). Stated how she is impressed with the providers that are in the community as well as the community support, there just needs to be a good anchor and said the hospital should be the anchor for the community because it allows the providers to practice. She also mentioned that Lilly Montoya, the CEO of St. Vincent's in Santa Fe wants this hospital to thrive so that way the patients of the community stay close to home. Would like to see this community being the centralized system of care. She also brought up how the hospital being sold was brought up in the last meeting and no one from the hospital board said anything was because they either didn't know or they were not legally at liberty to discuss any of the information. Her whole idea is to build and gain trust within the community.

Robert Nelson, Interim CEO and Interim Chief Nursing Officer – Alta Vista Regional Hospital: Informed that the public may not be aware that the hospital put an application to become a Critical Access Hospital (2/3 of rural hospitals are Critical Access), it went into place effective July 10, 2023 and wasn't aware of the application and paperwork going through during the last meeting. With Critical Access, for right now until November 30, 2023 when the hospital becomes a not-for-profit, the hospital cannot go above 10 in-patient beds, it is not commissioned for ICU beds currently and should be available for up to 15 swing bed patients. The Union was notified of the transition of the hospital on day one. Going forward Mr. Nelson will be working with administration to reestablish the bed count to regain ICU beds to lower the swing bed count and increase the in-patient capabilities in the hospital. The hospital has been maintaining an average daily census of 8-9, OR's are going well, ED is seeing up to 46 patients a day, staffed ER. Due to be over budget in terms of ED visits, almost at budget for surgeries, average daily census is above budget. A lot of great momentum. Critical Access program will allow the hospital to be reimbursed better for patient care, Medicare will pay 99%. With Critical Access they had to go through a regular joint commission survey, then went through a separate Critical Access survey that the hospital passed. During COVID-19, there was a very good business plan for moving to a larger critical access base because hospitals couldn't move patients out, there were financial plans and strategies to increase swing bed but when COVID-19 ended it went away. Having that swing bed capacity is important in the future as well as ICU capabilities. Although the hospital does not have a Labor and Delivery department right now, there are still some OB Nurses that are in other departments of the hospital, the equipment to deliver babies is still at the hospital and nurses take Neonatal Resuscitation Program (NRP) courses so that way if a woman does go into labor they will be able to deliver the baby but in terms of Nursery care, Obstetrics or anything in terms of setting the OB back up at the hospital will be a long-term strategy along with midwives, and prenatal care; and being that the hospital

doesn't already have this, it is starting from scratch and working with the new ownership to get things going. Mr. Nelson also commented that the hospital has a beautiful plan to get the community's trust back.

6. OPEN DISCUSSION

Robert Nelson: Behavioral Health concerns, he has noticed an incredible need for treatment as he has been seeing a lot more suicidal patients. Most helicopter flights that happen at the hospital are Behavioral Health patients. Financial books closed in the positive this month, and that has not happened in a long time. Wants to reach out to the community and explain the services that the hospital has, he wants to be involved with more community things even if it is church, to regain the community's trust.

Joe Lupica: Expressed to Rob Nelson to keep in good communication with Tim Shields, CEO of NMBHI when it comes to Behavioral Health concerns.

Pat Leahan: Spoke on the importance of having an OB to avoid deaths, there was a young woman that could not deliver her baby here and died on I-25. What will happen with the Union and Employees (with new ownership) and how long will Rob be here?

Robert Nelson- Union was notified of the transition of the hospital; he has a 6-month contract in place.

Edward Sena: Expressed the importance of Rob Nelson informing the public about what Critical Access means. He asked if there was a possibility of local physicians getting together to open up an Urgent Care without withdrawing privileges to doctors.

Robert Siegel answered, Dr. Mital Patel wants to open up an after-hours walk-in clinic which is another part of the SB7 grant that they applied for and they have been working on it for 2 years but they would only do that in conjunction with the hospital. We have been looking for providers for a long time and are having trouble finding them.

Mital- It has been on and off that they have been looking for providers because they were never sure if there would be an Urgent Care or not.

Edward- the community would rather go to an Urgent Care to be seen for around \$100, rather than the ER for \$1,000 and ultimately and Urgent Care would provide more business for the hospital.

Robert Nelson- it would depend on the payer source of the individual so prices may be cheaper for someone to be seen at the ER rather than Urgent Care.

Christina- Medicaid has co-pays with MCO's. No co-pays with ER if it is an emergency but if they determine it otherwise, the hospital gets stuck with the bill.

Joe- Maybe the way to go is have the hospital sponsor an Urgent Care.

Michael Lopez- There was Stat Care that was ran by La Vida Health Services and it was a group of doctors that was a really good Urgent Care but we lost providers and it was forced to close.

Joe- asked Robert Nelson what the average wait time in the ER is currently at

Robert Nelson- 7 minutes on average

Robert Seigel: Commented on Senate Bill 7: Rural Healthcare Delivery Fund, applied for monies on October 6, 2023 specifically for women's health (1 of 3 areas applied for) if grant is awarded, they will try to recruit an OB/GYN and midwife that would be willing to come to the community.

Christina Rivas-Campos: Commented on the statewide OB issue, and mentioned there are a couple of programs that will be provided by Medicaid which includes increased reimbursement, primary care & prenatal care. RMOMS program that is being worked on to have telemedicine for prenatal care. There is going to be an infusion of money for behavioral health. There will be enhanced payments to get these programs up and going as well as nursing education and workforce development.

Michael Lopez: Stated that we need more support from our local representatives because they have not been in the past.

Matt Martinez: Mentioned how he was glad that this committee came together to have these meetings without knowing anything about the hospital was going to sell, and thanks all the physicians and staff that have stuck around through all of it.

Joe- Stated that he and Christina are wanting to put together some KPI's based off the information that was provided and talked about during this meeting.

Edward- Asked Dr. Michael Lopez, what it would take for this organization to convince him and regain his trust to refer his patients to the hospital.

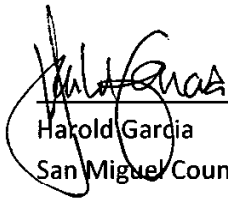
Michael- We just need a functioning hospital that is supportive of the community's physicians.

Mital- Wants to see Sunrise Clinics and someone from El Centro present during these meetings.

ADJOURNMENT


Motion to adjourn meeting made by Kenny Medina. Second by Pat Leahan. Motion carried.
Adjourned at 7:54 PM.

Approved this 9th day of **November 2023** as the Official Minutes of the San Miguel County Healthcare Study Committee Meeting held 12 October 2023 at the NMHU Student Center, Las Vegas, New Mexico


Harold Gardia
San Miguel County Chairman


Christina Rivas-Campos
San Miguel County Liaison

ATTEST:


Louanna G. Ortega
San Miguel County Clerk




Minutes submitted by Megan Stroud, Executive Assistant

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