

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

**Chairwoman Sayegh, Legislators Addonizio & Jonke**

**Tuesday**

**6:00PM**

**August 9, 2022**

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 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 - Approval of Minutes – July 14, 2022 Meeting**

The minutes were approved as submitted.

**Item #4 - Discussion/Update/Putnam Hospital Center Operations/PHC President Dr. Mark Hirko**

Dr. Hirko stated since his last visit to speak to this Committee, he is glad to say that the conditions at Putnam Hospital have improved. He stated June and July 2022 were the busiest months in the emergency department since before COVID. He stated the wait times are not as long as they used to be. He noted that the Nuvance system has close to 1,700 job openings. He stated they are replacing employees as fast as they are leaving. He stated people who have not been in healthcare tend to fade out and leave within their 90-day trial period. He stated the system has come together to figure out how to maintain the staffing. He stated the current climate has forced healthcare systems to retool. He stated a large percentage of nurses at Putnam Hospital are part of travelling nurses agencies, but that percentage is slowly dropping. He stated the system has now looked into the international pool of nurses, with three (3) nurses coming to Putnam Hospital. He stated he has formulated a three (3) year plan to turn the state of the hospital around, from an estimated \$24 million operating loss this year to as close to even as possible. He stated this plan has been vetted and endorsed by the Nuvance Board. He stated the plan involves a multi-faceted approach with emphasis on growing primary care. He stated over 80% of the patients at Putnam Hospital come from CareMount/Optum. He stated a big change that has happened recently is a rotation of surgeons have been coming from Vassar Hospital, which will allow the local population more access to specialty care. He stated they are looking to do a facelift of the Labor and Delivery Department. He stated they are looking at a tentative date of December 7, 2022 to restart Labor and Delivery services. He stated the hospital will have 24/7 coverage in Labor and Delivery. He stated there will also be a minimum of two (2) Nuvance based OBGYN's. He stated the hospital's focus on women's health will grow over the next few years. He stated Nuvance will no longer be splitting leadership duties. He stated each hospital will have its own dedicated senior leadership team. He stated the hospital plans to increase community outreach in order to better serve. He stated the hospital will move to a more team-based approach to nursing, with multiple nurses assigned to a group of patients. He stated they are increasing the focus on using technology. He stated COVID has helped elevate the

hospital's care offerings to patients. He stated patient numbers have begun to go back to pre-COVID levels. He stated they are encouraged by the morale of the employees, and they have received good ratings for the care the hospital provides. He stated they will continue to work on the patient experience. He noted that family members are upset when they are not allowed to visit patients due to COVID restrictions.

Chairwoman Sayegh thanked Dr. Hirko.

Legislator Addonizio stated there will be many happy people that the birthing center will be reopening on December 7<sup>th</sup>.

Dr. Hirko stated when they closed the Labor and Delivery unit, they expected it to be for about a year, but it turned out to be less than that, which is very encouraging. He stated the workforce is being trained and modernized. He stated the Labor and Delivery area will become a place for a comprehensive women's health program.

Legislator Jonke thanked Dr. Hirko for presenting to the Committee. He stated Putnam Hospital is very important to Putnam County.

Chairwoman Sayegh questioned how many employees are at Putnam Hospital.

Dr. Hirko stated currently there are approximately 600. He stated at its peak, there were around 900 employees. He stated this fits the current utilization of the hospital. He stated there are 62 job openings at the hospital.

Chairwoman Sayegh questioned what the protocols are for mental health patients who are discharged. She questioned if they are connected with a peer or if there are follow ups.

Dr. Hirko stated if they have prior history, they are recommended to go to a rehab program, but it varies on a case-by-case basis. He noted there are many options. He stated the County has approached Putnam Hospital about a crisis stabilization center. He stated the hospital is looking at options to place this center.

Chairwoman Sayegh requested more information on the psychiatry services offered at the hospital.

Dr. Hirko stated their psychiatry is very strong. He stated it is one of the busiest in-patient psychiatric units in this area of the state. He stated the hospital has 20 beds and runs at capacity. He stated the staffing has been stable now. He noted the Nuvance residency for psychiatry is centered at Putnam Hospital. He stated they are working with the State to expand their psychiatric services. He added that they have applied to the State for forgiveness for their lien, which would help free up capital for their stabilization plan.

Legislator Albano stated he had great experience with the Emergency Room recently. He suggested providing estimated timeframes to people who are waiting to be seen. He stated he believes this would help make the wait times easier.

Dr. Hirko stated they are looking at identifying where the bottlenecks are in the Emergency Department as far as the wait times. He stated COVID changed how efficient they used to be.

Legislator Montgomery thanked Dr. Hirko for the update. She stated she has heard from mental health providers that they wish hospitals would make use of medication assisted treatments. She stated there seems to be a shortfall there. She stated the hope is to have patients go home with medication.

Dr. Hirko stated that is one of the reasons many hospitals are looking to create stabilization centers on site.

Bill Nulk, Resident, stated he recently was with a group of senior citizens who expressed frustration with the care while admitted, but it seems that the hospital is working on that. He stated in the past a nursing training program was mentioned, and he questioned if that was still a possibility.

Dr. Hirko stated there is a shortage of nursing schools. He stated Nuvance has strong relationships with certain universities and colleges to have their nurses rotate at Nuvance facilities. He stated they are setting up nursing residencies where Nuvance will train nurses in specialized skills for certification.

Chairwoman Sayegh thanked Dr. Hirko for his time and the information provided. She stated Putnam Hospital is a great hospital and she looks forward to its future.

**Item #5 - Other Business – Duly Noted**

**Item #6 – Adjournment**

There being no further business, at 6:38 P.M., Chairwoman Sayegh made a motion to adjourn; Seconded by Legislator Jonke. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Administrative Assistant Ed Gordon.