

Community Comment Dec. 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014

By Jon Sapper  
Health Care Crisis

Tried to find a doctor lately? Cyrus Massoumi in an article titled, “The Health Care Crisis No One is Talking About” says, “If you live in rural U.S., there is a good chance you are in a de facto health care desert.” End quote.

The shortage of physicians is well known, but the current projection is that in just ten years, the shortfall could be more than 200,000 doctors nationwide, with a real crisis in primary care. Rural areas are being hit the hardest because many physicians want to live in larger population areas for economic and cultural reasons. If we were talking about a gas shortage for our cars and trucks, it would be on the news every night with interviews of oil company executives, politicians, gas station owners and the citizen on the street. Why is this health care issue not getting the same kind of attention?

A study conducted by the health care consulting firm Merrit Hawkins, found the average American must wait three weeks to see a doctor. They say that’s long enough for a small avoidable health issue to become a full blown crisis. In some cities, they say the wait time is approaching a staggering two months. Compounding the problem in our area will be an aging population and increasing demand for health care.

Our local dedicated physicians and support staff are not the cause of the problem. And, in my opinion, this is not just a medical community issue. This is a community challenge of huge proportions, and that if we are not able to get a handle on it, will cause significant long term harm to the foundations of our communities on the North Coast. An affordable accessible health care system is fundamental to a quality of life and a healthy secure community.

It’s not a simple problem to fix, even though some say it can be boiled down to two simple strategies; one, just get more doctors to come here and two, use our current health care assets more efficiently. That’s like saying just shoot that rocket in the sky and land it on that comet (which was done last week) but it’s a very complex set of factors that need to be considered to solve this problem and people living in Kansas or Colorado or Washington D.C. are not going to solve it

for us. We are going to have to do it. Yes, Federal and State policies affect us, but that just underscores the need for us to use our ingenuity and buckle down even more. I'd like to think all we need to do is adjust a little here and change a little there; but I'm beginning to wonder if we may need to re-think the very structure of our local health care delivery system. That's daunting and it won't be fixed by this Friday. If you think it's tough finding a doctor now, just wait and see what it's like if we don't do anything.

This has been Jon Sapper for Community Comment.