

**The Highlander**

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**OUR MISSION**

To tell the story of Haliburton County each week.

To be a source of information and inspiration through stories and ideas.

To report on issues, people and events important to the community.

To reflect and promote pride in the culture, people and landscape of The Highlands.

To encourage Highlanders to believe in themselves, in our community, and in their power to make our place in the world better every day.

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# County needs HHHS' plan



By Lisa Gervais

I recently returned from a walking holiday in Spain. Even though the sojourn itself was not until early April, I began my preparations in January. I booked flights, a train, and accommodation months before arriving. I set off knowing that there would be surprises but because of my meticulous planning, few, if any.

Three weeks from today, the Minden emergency room will close and services amalgamated at the Haliburton hospital site. However, when I sat down for a Zoom chat with HHHS CEO Carolyn Plummer and board chair David O'Brien this week – specifically to ask them about plans for June 1 – I was disappointed by what little I was told.

I had hoped that revealing more of the corporation's plans to the public would somehow allay some of the fear out there, as well as the rumours and speculation a dearth of information can create. In essence, I asked Plummer and O'Brien – in a *Jerry Maguire* kind of way – 'help me to help you.' I emerged from the chat feeling quite frustrated as I had little to share with readers.

We addressed the issues of doctors staffing the consolidated ER, since Dr. Dennis Fiddler had made it clear during the week

that his Minden physician group was withdrawing its services – despite assurances they would have continued at the Minden ER indefinitely.

I specifically asked what doctors would staff the new ER. I received assurances they were working on it and news would be forthcoming "very, very soon." As much as I pressed, I received no concrete answers. I understand some of the reasoning behind that. If there are negotiations ongoing between the Ministry of Health and the Ontario Medical Association, they can't be discussed openly. Plummer did say maybe Fiddler's group would help out. If you read the letter in today's *Highlander*, it doesn't sound like the Minden Physician Group is about to change its mind, so it's not much of a plan.

Plummer did seem to indicate they would be okay from a nursing schedule perspective, but only two weeks previous she indicated they'd have to hire about half-a-dozen nurses.

As for the physical site itself, we did get a bit more information and an offer of a schematic floor plan up to now. It was appreciated learning that the department would endeavour to separate true emergency

walk-ins or ambulance transports for those of us who do not have a local family doctor and are left with no choice but to go to the E.R., for non-emergent situations.

And while we understand the June 1 transition has to be top of mind for HHHS, it was conceded the future of the Minden site is still being considered in the background. Ideas are being bandied about. No one wants to make promises that could fall through. We're still waiting for that plan as well.

We truly hope that HHHS' assurance it will share its plans in a matter of 'days' comes to fruition. The lack of transparency has only fueled the flames of discontent across Haliburton County. Every situation that presents – whether it is pending highway works along 118 – only deepens local fears. HHHS must begin to quell that now. They really should have long ago.

We're all going on a trip come June 1 and we'd like to know the plans are well in place so that the eventual hiccups are minor and won't cause ripples across the Highlands.

## LETTERS

Dear editor,

As physicians of the Minden emergency department, we would like to express our sincere appreciation and support to the wonderful community we have had the privilege of serving for the past 28 years.

It has been an honour to provide emergency medical care to you, our adopted neighbours, friends, and community members during some of your most vulnerable moments. It is with a heavy heart that we must inform you that the decision to close the Minden ED was not ours to make. Despite our best efforts and unwavering commitment to the community, circumstances beyond our control have led to this challenging decision by Haliburton Highlands Health Services.

Our group was informed of this decision a few hours prior to the public media releases on April 20. This emergency department has been a strong and steady presence in many emergency physicians' careers. The physicians of the Minden ED feel a special attachment to the staff and community. Since the news became public, we have heard from past physicians who have reached out to us to convey their appreciation to your community for the time they were able to serve and provide emergency medical services here. In 1995, when Dr. David Fiddler heard that the ED was potentially closing due to a shortage of physicians, he recruited his brother Dr. Doug Fiddler to find

other emergency physicians from community hospitals to support the Minden ED. The plan was to keep it open for three months while the community found more physicians. That was 27 years ago. The brothers, as many have come to know them, were mainstays in the ED and the community knew them well. Over time, emergency physicians were selectively recruited to work here. At one point, there were four heads of emergency medicine working in the Minden ER. We took pride in knowing we were able to provide continuous physician coverage, without any gaps, over these years.

Support from Health Force Ontario was not required until April 2023. Health Force Ontario is a government-funded job board to help get physicians where they are needed in Ontario. These physicians typically have a base hospital they work at and provide coverage to community and rural hospitals at an ad hoc basis.

Prior to the closure being announced, our group had coverage until September 2023, with small support required from Health Force Ontario. In the fall, there were physicians who were expected to fill these gaps, bringing us back to full coverage. We have Dr. Bruno Helt to thank, who has recruited and maintained the emergency physician group for the past decade. Please know we have always been deeply committed to ensuring the highest

standard of emergency medical care to the community. As HHHS staffing shortages evolved over the past two years, the Minden physician group became involved in service reduction discussions in November of 2021. We offered our support to various reduction options that involved partial ED closure scenarios, but we were clear that we could not support a full closure scenario for one of the EDs. The Minden ED physicians knew it would be the end of our ability to provide the highest standard of care to you. Over the years, increasing ED volumes have made these shifts more challenging, however a 24-hour shift was still feasible to do so and provided a balance that made the long drive from our home bases acceptable. We told the HHHS executive and board in February 2022 we could not provide physician coverage if one of the EDs were going to close, and it is still the case today.

We will continue to work in our home sites and may see you at one of these locations in the future. Thank you for allowing us to be a part of this wonderful community. Over nearly three decades, it's been our privilege to serve you. Thank you for the trust you have placed in us, for allowing us to serve you, learn from you, and for the memories that will sustain us for years to come.

*On behalf of the Minden Physician Group,  
Dennis Fiddler, DO, CCFP (EM)*

**HAVE AN OPINION?**  
Send your letters to [editor@thehighlander.ca](mailto:editor@thehighlander.ca)  
(300 words max)

## LETTERS

### Need to be heard

Dear editor,

'Time Is Tissue' is a medical axiom.

Closing an emergency department causes more than inconvenience. In case of a stroke, heart attack, embolism etc., when blood stops flowing to tissue, tissue dies. In resuscitation, every minute counts. Interceding quickly is crucial for recovery. Delay results in death or permanent disability.

Knowing this, when we were looking for a cottage, the first requirement was that it be within 15 minutes of an emergency department.

In view of the fact that universal public health care was the only option permitted by the Supreme Court when it refused to hear a case for private health care, how is it acceptable that Minden Hospital Emergency is closing down?

We need to let our needs be heard by our politicians, both by mail and by the ballot box.

Paul Zalan MD  
Minden

### Past HHHS chairs disagree with decision

Dear editor,

As past chairs, who helped guide the development of HHHS since inception, we strongly disagree with the Minden ED closure.

It's unconscionable and flies in the face of more than two decades of responsible health care developed by the corporation. There are many valid reasons in opposition. The response from citizens, through letters, petitions, signs and demonstrations provide ample indication of the community's support for the continuation of the service.

We offer these observations:

- a complete lack of transparency. When planning for HHHS began over 25 years ago, many scenarios were considered for the County. These discussions, sometimes passionate and heated, took place at public meetings with extensive press coverage. The community was involved and when decisions were finalized, while not everyone agreed, the community moved on. Minden hospital 'gave up' its argument to retain in-patient beds, in exchange for a commitment to keep full-time, fully-funded emergency, and a range of community programs. This decision 'betrays' this understanding and resurrects community division. It also came without consultation with the Minden service area communities most impacted by the action.

- A six-week timeline provides little or no time for careful planning or reasoned community input. We wonder, was this decision deliberately and secretly taken in the hope that, with short notice, it would just slide through? It's already disrupted the smooth operation of the Minden site. ER doctors and staff have begun looking for other places to work after June 1 even though a full roster of medical professionals through September is in place.

- There is no plan. Other than vague descriptions of amalgamation of services in one locale, there is a disheartening lack of

foresight to support the decision. Where is the plan?

- What about the professional staff? We are aware that for the most part, the Minden ED had been able to maintain the level of staffing to deliver services through recent years when the pandemic put maximum stress on the system. Why is this being discontinued when it has demonstrated its resiliency and dedication to providing health care?

We recommend the board cancel the permanent closure; strengthen the health care for the Highlands, particularly emergency; focus on the partially completed master plan and get it done; encourage the involvement of citizens, all governments, and the Ontario Health Team in the development of a robust system that meets the needs of all of the community HHHS was created to serve.

Jeanne Anthon, Dave Bonham, Jack Brezina, Paul Heffer and Hugh Nichol

### Care of citizens

Dear editor,

As an Australian citizen and permanent resident of Canada, I am dismayed to learn of the closure of Minden Emergency Department.

I've lived in the Haliburton-Minden area for nearly a decade. As your paper recently reported, the Census reveals that this County is now the fastest growing in Ontario and the fourth fastest growing in Canada.

We have seen how quickly local and global health crises can arise. This region is unique in Canada. The far-flung roads and web of lakes means emergency care must not be consolidated.

Consolidating emergency care is all about saving dollars in the short-term. It's not about future planning. The blatant lack of care for fellow citizens by the elected officials and politicized boards continues to astound me.

Canada is renowned around the world as a kind country, open, caring, yet the politicians and their penny pinching do not reflect the Canadian spirit.

I'm often asked what's the difference between Australia and Canada and I'd say this: care of its citizens. It's offensive that an elected official, such as Laurie Scott, should be part of a decision to take away resources from the people they were elected to serve.

Helen Parker  
West Guilford

### Hope they can continue

Dear editor,

As a resident of Minden and long-time cottager in Haliburton County, I have been (unfortunately) fortunate to have been treated at the Minden hospital on several occasions.

The waiting list for a family doctor in the area is years long and the ER doctors and staff always treated me with dignity and respect in a timely manner for visits that I would have normally seen a family doctor or walk-in clinic for.

Not one doctor at the Minden ER would accept my apology for taking their time in treating me for a non life-threatening

## PHOTO OF THE WEEK



Rob McCaig snapped this shot of two fox kits on his property in Haliburton.

procedure. I was, however, non apologetic but extremely grateful for the life saving care my husband received when he had a heart attack.

I don't have to reiterate the demographics and stats of Minden except to say that my husband and I are a part of the senior majority and rely on timely emergency care in close proximity to our home.

I thank the medical staff and hospital personnel at the Minden hospital for the exemplary care they provide for our community and the thousands of seasonal residents. My hope is they can continue to do so.

Vicki Mattucci  
Minden Hills

### Missing in action?

Dear editor,

I am writing to express my frustration with Laurie Scott's lack of response and support for our situation. Simply, here are my thoughts. Missing, Laurie Scott, MPP Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock. Believed to be hiding out in her Lindsay or Toronto constituency office.

Laurie, please reply ASAP to our letters, emails and phone calls.

Your constituents need your help in averting a health catastrophe.

Signed, your concerned, frightened and angry constituents.

Carolyn Pawson  
Boshkung Lake

### Loss of emergency doctors

Dear editor,

Among the many questions around the closing of the Minden ER, another one needs to be aired.

There is a fundamental difference in the work models of the Minden and Haliburton Emergency Departments.

The Minden doctors work a 24-hour shift and typically come from out of town – Peterborough, Barrie, Toronto. They are willing to do this because the 24-hour shift makes the work attractive.

The Haliburton Emergency Department is largely staffed by local doctors who work a 12-hour shift. With perhaps some exceptions, the Minden doctors will be unwilling to travel to Haliburton for a 12-hour shift.

With the closing of the Minden ER, the visits to the Haliburton ER will increase dramatically with little, if any, increase in the doctor coverage in the ER. Single doctor coverage of the Haliburton ER will lead to a substantial reduction in the level of care. There may be models of work which can be implemented to attract the Minden doctors but these have not been considered by HHHS. All of this speaks to the need to pause the closure of Minden ER, as advocated by Minden Hills mayor Bob Carter, until a sensible model for emergency service for Haliburton County can be worked out.

Bruce McClelland  
Gull Lake

### We need to be better informed

Dear editor,

On the closing of the Minden ER, I have been following the story in the local papers and attended the rally on May 6. It seems some of the conversation is about Minden versus Haliburton. Who supports who. The whole County and beyond supports the local OJHL Haliburton County Huskies team. Where will our players go now if they get injured?

We have not heard anything about a 'plan B'. What is happening to the Minden hospital space? I sure hope it's not some private for-profit company going in there.

Our County is aging and has many underprivileged that need care.

Cathy McIlmurray  
West Guilford