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[Updated] Rumors swirl as hospital financial help is explored

***Editor's note: This story has been updated to reflect that Hiawatha Community Hospital Human Resources Director, Alison Kerl, did respond to requests for comment from MSC News***

**(KNZA)--Rumors are swirling regarding a change in leadership at the Hiawatha Community Hospital, with sources close to the operations saying an interim CEO has been put in place.**

**The rumors began Friday, and at that time, hospital board leadership referred all questions pertaining to personnel to hospital Human Resources Director Alison Kerl.**

**Kerl, on Tuesday, told MSC News, "I'm unable to comment on personnel matters."**

**The rumored change of leadership comes as the hospital seeks financial assistance for what hospital leadership is calling a financial crisis.**

**Last week it was confirmed that four business office personnel positions have been eliminated as part of the continuing effort to streamline operations.**

**On Monday, the financial status was discussed as a joint city-county committee, formed to look at options for assisting the hospital, held its second meeting.**

**Currently, the committee is leaning toward a county-wide half-cent sales tax to provide financial support not only for the Hiawatha Community Hospital but also healthcare needs in Horton where its hospital is also reportedly struggling.**

**The Horton Community Hospital, owned by a Florida-based company, has not yet requested financial help from the county.**

**The sales tax, which would contain a sunset clause, would require voter approval, with a special mail ballot election discussed. The estimated $10,000 to $20,000 cost would be split between Brown County and the City of Hiawatha.**

**Proceeds from the sales tax, estimated to generate around $600,000 annually, would be used to pay off bonds that would be issued.**

**Hospital Board member Jake Wisdom, a member of the joint committee, said during the meeting the hospital roughly needs around $5 million ( soft number) to cover operational costs and debt service.**

**The committee voted Monday to recommend to the Hiawatha Hospital Board of Trustees that they hire an outside healthcare management and consulting firm, with expertise in Medicare and Medicaid issues, to provide assistance to the hospital.**

**The committee also voted to recommend that the Brown County Commission, Hiawatha City Commission, and Horton City Commission, have voting representation on the hospital board.**

**In addition, they requested to receive the hospital's 2018 financial statements and pro-forma 2019 financial statement.**

**The committee will hold its next meeting on Friday, February 22nd.**

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