

Horton Hospital closes its doors

(KAIR)--The Horton Community Hospital has closed its doors. “We are closed, as of immediately. We tried,” Hospital CEO Ty Compton told MSC News just minutes after 5:00 Tuesday evening, March 12.

The closing follows financial struggles for the hospital, with Florida-based firm iHealthcare retained in February to take over management of the troubled facility.

Horton Mayor Bryan Stirton told MSC News Tuesday, prior to the closing, that negative impacts will be felt in the Horton community. “If folks have to leave to find new jobs, it will impact the school district, too. All of the local businesses will suffer. I commend the employees for their support to keeping the hospital open this long. Without them it would have been closed by now. Reports say they have been without a paycheck for almost 6 weeks.”

Horton officials say the employees had not received a paycheck since February 15. “They’ve given everything they could to try and hold out as long as they can,” Horton City Administrator John Calhoon said of the employees that remained at the hospital prior to Tuesday’s closing.

Along with a 25 bed critical access hospital, the Horton Hospital operated a health clinic and ambulance service.

The Brown County Commission Monday approved an agreement with Hiawatha-based Town and Country EMS to provide ambulance service in the southern portion of the county in anticipation of the closure.

Calhoon said arrangements are now in place to house the ambulances, and to provide a small office for personnel. “We have had several meetings over the past few weeks and made arrangements with Town and Country Ambulance Service, and their owner, to immediately take over ambulance service, so that will be covered. The ambulances will be housed at the armory here in Horton. They’re already there stationed.”

That plan went into effect at 5 p.m. Tuesday at the time the hospital closed its doors.

The Hiawatha Community Hospital, which is also struggling financially, has committed to opening a rural health clinic in Horton should voters approve a 10-year countywide half-cent sales tax during a special election in May.

The Brown County Commission Monday approved a resolution setting that

special election for May 21.

Kansas Governor Laura Kelly late Wednesday morning issued a statement on the hospital's closing.

Following the closure Tuesday of Horton Community Hospital, Governor Laura Kelly extended assistance from her administration and highlighted the critical importance of community hospitals in rural Kansas.

“I’m concerned for the community of Horton as they face the serious loss of their local hospital,” Kelly said. “This is becoming a far too frequent occurrence in our state. Local hospitals are key to the health of Kansas families and are often one of the largest employers in a small town. Elected leaders must work together to do more to support our local hospitals.”

Three rural hospitals have closed in the last three months. Mercy Hospital in Fort Scott closed on December 31st. Oswego Community Hospital closed in February. And Horton Community Hospital closed its doors Tuesday.

“I’ve directed our agencies to coordinate support for hospital staff during this challenging time,” Kelly said. “A closure of a hospital has ripple effects through the community and region. Our KANSASWORKS team will be in Horton Thursday to assist hospital staff with filing for unemployment benefits, as well as job applications and re-employment services.”

The Governor’s Office, Kansas Department of Commerce and Kansas Department of Labor are working to provide support to employees of the hospital, ensure unemployment benefits applications are streamlined, and re-employment opportunities are available.

In response to Tuesday’s closure, KANSASWORKS will be hosting Rapid Response Informational Meetings Thursday in Horton in conjunction with the Community Outreach Event at the Horton Public Library.

Efforts to assist affected hospital employees will include Rapid Response Informational Meetings at 1 p.m., 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. Thursday at the Horton Public Library, 809 1st Ave E. No registration is required. Information will be shared about KANSASWORKS, Workforce Center employment and training services and how to file unemployment insurance benefits.

Also, the KANSASWORKS Mobile Workforce Center will be at the Horton Public Library from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Thursday to provide additional re-employment services. Workforce Center staff will be available to help with registering on KANSASWORKS.com, creating a resumé, job search assistance and filling out job applications.

The Rapid Response team was also sent to Oswego following the closure of its hospital last month.

Any questions about KANSASWORKS should be directed to the Department of Commerce.

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