

KEY STAKEHOLDERS FOCUS GROUP

INTRODUCTION

On Monday, November 6, 2006, Arrow Consultants conducted a focus group with key stakeholders of the East Hampton Healthcare Foundation along with representative members of the East Hampton community. Focus group participants were invited to attend the meeting by members of the Executive Committee of EHHF. Nine people participated in the 1.5 hour focus group. Below is the list of attendees and their titles.

- Larry Cantwell, East Hampton Village Administrator
- Joe Kazickas, Managing Director, Brown Harris Stevens Real Estate,
- Stuart Epstein, Owner-Devlin McNiff Real Estate
- Pat Kyle- Full-time East Hampton resident since 1973
- Bill Heppenheimer, former chairman of Southampton Hospital, EHHF Trustee Emeritus
- George Yates, Proprietor-Dayton, Ritz & Osborne
- David Rattray, Editor and co-owner, East Hampton Star
- Hurley Ryan, Local resident (F/T and P/T since 1942)
- Sylvia Mendelman, Resident for over 25 years, owner of three marinas in East Hampton, author of the book, Three Mile Harbor"

Group participants provided the facilitators with information related to general access to healthcare issues on the East End, as well as specific feedback related to services provided at the East Hampton Healthcare Center, and their perception of the organization in the community.

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

Focus group participants were asked to introduce themselves and to describe their position/role in the community. Participants were then asked to respond to the following questions related to EHHF and the community.

1. What words best describe the East Hampton Healthcare Foundation and Center?
2. Over the next 5 years, what are the most pressing healthcare needs facing the East Hampton Community?
3. What is your perception of both the current and future roles the East Hampton Healthcare Foundation and Center should play in meeting those needs?

QUESTION #1: WHAT WORDS BEST DESCRIBE THE EAST HAMPTON HEALTHCARE FOUNDATION AND CENTER?

Focus group participants were invited first to offer words or phrases that best describe the East Hampton Healthcare Foundation. It was clear from their responses that the work of the Foundation generated a positive reaction from the participants. Sample responses included:

- “Convenient”
- “Close”
- “Necessary to the community”
- “Quality Care”
- “Well-organized/Talented/Quiet” (referred specifically to the Foundation)
- “Not for Serious Problems”
- “Real estate project”
- “Not a hospital, not a clinic, not an ER, but provides ‘immediate’ care”
- Extraordinary pediatrics services

These words/phrases lead to a discussion of the specific services and hours of operation of the East Hampton Healthcare Center. While most participants were aware of that there are a wide-range of services provided at the Center (i.e. lab work, physician services and pharmacy services) and perceive this to be a great strength of the organization, most were unable to delineate the specific services offered at the center, or the hours of operation. While some knew there were weekend hours offered by the doctors, many were unclear whether they could access those services on a “walk-in” basis because primary care physicians are perceived as having “maxed out” patient loads. Regarding the range of specialty services offered at the center, one group participant commented, “There’s a sense of surprise from most residents. They don’t know what’s going on here, what specialties are here. Is there dermatology? That’s an outreach problem.”

QUESTION #2 – OVER THE NEXT 5 YEARS WHAT ARE THE GREATEST HEALTHCARE NEEDS FACING THE EAST HAMPTON COMMUNITY?

The discussion related to the quality of current services offered at EHC lead naturally into further discussion about the future healthcare needs on the East End. It was clear that while participants appreciated the access to the range of services offered at the Center, each expressed in their own way the need for MORE; more primary care physicians (and pediatricians) who can take new patients, expanded specialty care hours (especially dermatology and cardiology), and most importantly establishment of an urgent care facility that would address the need for more comprehensive after-hours care. Related to the need for urgent care, one focus group participant commented, “I’m sure people don’t have a clue what to do, especially in the off-season. If you don’t have a regular doctor and you cut your leg, are you going to go all the way to Southampton (ER)?”

One participant who has a family member who is in the mental health field noted that access to urgent mental health services on the East End is virtually non-existent and is an extremely pressing need. He commented, “If there’s an emergency involving a mental health issue...they transport you to Stonybrook. Southampton doesn’t want to be into in-patient mental health.”

Finally there was a great deal of discussion related to the history of Southampton Hospital and the role it will play in defining access to healthcare on the East End in the future. It is clear that group participants had different strategies for dealing with (or avoiding) the need to access services at Southampton. While most participants acknowledged the need for Southampton Hospital as an emergency facility, most stated they would go elsewhere for surgical or other services. Several group participants expressed anxiety related to the New York State initiative which would rationalize hospital services to cut costs, focusing one type of service or department at one hospital and another at a nearby hospital. One local business owner stated, “The people in my office are anxious about it. Maybe the state is in favor of Riverhead (i.e Peconic Bay Medical Center), then what?” It was clear from that comment that advocating for a stronger position (related to the rationalization of services) for Southampton Hospital would be seen as benefiting the entire East End.

QUESTION #3 – WHAT IS YOUR PERCEPTION OF BOTH THE CURRENT AND FUTURE ROLES THE EAST HAMPTON HEALTHCARE FOUNDATION SHOULD PLAY IN MEETING THOSE NEEDS?

It was clear that participants in the Key Stakeholders Focus Group were eager to offer ideas and suggestions as to both the current and future roles the EHHF can play in shaping access to healthcare on the East End. In keeping with the organization’s mission to “improve access to high-quality healthcare” for all residents of the East Hampton community, their recommendations centered on three areas:

1. **Direct Healthcare Services:** EHHF should offer a “deeper bench” of available healthcare services (both primary and specialty care) at the EHHF, including the areas discussed in the previous section.
2. **Community Education:** EHHF should act as a conduit and promoter for healthcare information for the East Hampton community by:
 - a. Expanding on the successes of the EHHF’s Annual Healthcare Symposium by offering more targeted workshop-type programs (no-more 2 hours in length) specifically designed to meet the needs of specific populations in the community (i.e. Lyme disease, health-related concerns of the “the mommy network”, “sandwich-

- generation families, or residents who are dealing with mental health issues of family members).
- b. Expanding the use the existing EHHF website to include a health-related “community events” calendar which would feature programs, classes and information sessions offered not just by the EHHF, but by other providers in the community as well. The website could also include an update article or feature that would be of particular interest to East Hampton residents. Commented one participant, “If the mission of the organization is to improve the health of the community, then it should provide more community health information.”
 - c. Sponsoring an annual meeting where local business owners can receive accurate information to trends and changes in health insurance plans, so they can in turn better meet the needs of their employees in selecting the plans for their companies. An added benefit of this “educational” piece would be to encourage the employers to share plans and negotiate better terms with insurance providers.
3. **Health-Related Advocacy:** EHHF should act as an advocate on both the local and state levels for healthcare-related issues which specifically impact East Hampton Township. One group member put it succinctly when he said, “The Foundation should have a ‘seat at the table’ in matters related to healthcare on the East End.”
- a. Group participants universally felt that there should be members of the governing board of EHHF actively participating in the strategic planning process that impacts the future of Southampton Hospital.
 - b. Participants also felt that it would be consistent with the mission of EHHF for the organization to actively advocate (i.e., represent the East Hampton community) on the State level (as in the current issue related to the rationalization of hospital services on the East End.) Information related to health-related issues of interest to the community could also appear on the EHHF website thus reinforcing the Foundation’s role mission to be a “catalyst” for healthcare improvement.

Closing Comments

It was clear from their level of participation, enthusiasm, and thoughtful comments that the members of the Key Stakeholders focus group were personally invested in the success and sustained growth of East Hampton Healthcare Foundation and Center. Most had been aware of the Foundation and

its goals since its inception and many have been financial supporters over the years. Given their level of commitment to both EHHF and the community of East Hampton, it is not surprising that many (even some who admitted they looked with skepticism on the project during its earliest stages) eagerly shared their thoughts on the direction the Foundation should take as it charts its future growth. Expanding access to primary care, specialty physicians, and creating an urgent care facility for the East Hampton were seen as the “priority tasks”.

It is also clear that one of the greatest challenges facing EHHF as it embarks on this next “growth phase” is addressing the transition from being a host and sponsor of quality healthcare in East Hampton to a more visible community education and advocacy role. The community stakeholders who participated in this event seemed to be calling for the Foundation to be more visible and invite a broader base of community residents to participate and inform the mission and activities of the organization. One group participant put it quite succinctly when he stated, “The Foundation has done a good job being a landlord. The big issue is ... is that it? Who do they want to be in the future?”