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Preparation Inadequate On New Health Agency, Regional Director Says

By DAVE ERNST

Consumer education and participation in the creation of a new regional health planning agency are being sacrificed to meet a deadline that may well turn out to be meaningless, a health official said Wednesday night.

Dr. John R. F. Ingall, director of the Lakes Area Regional Medical Program, said consumers have not been made aware of just how wide-ranging the powers of this new agency will be.

It will be known as a Health Systems Agency (HSA) and will assume the duties of Dr. Ingall's group and the Western New York Comprehensive Health Planning Council. The new agency will have great control over what does and does not happen in the field of health care in the eight Western New York Counties.

HSAs were designed to allow maximum citizen participation in health planning.

Yet only a few minutes are given to explanation of a complex law at public hearings being held this week and next throughout the county, Dr. Ingall said. Then people who have never met each other are being asked to select some of their number to form a nominating committee which will in turn help select a governing body for the HSA.

HIS COMMENTS, made at the second hearing of the series in the BOCES Center in East Aurora, were similar to complaints at a hearing Tuesday night in Williamsville.

Paul G. Rohrdanz, a member of the Health Planning Council, did not disagree, but said the application for federal funding had to beat a Jan. 19 deadline. A public hearing on the final application must be held 30 days prior to that and has been set for Dec. 13.

The Western New York HSA must compete with 217 others throughout the country for part of \$60 million. Delays could mean all the money will be gone before the application is submitted, Mr. Rohrdanz said.

BUT DR. INGALL said the federal government will find it politically impossible to fund any HSAs until it also sees proposals submitted to meet a second "cycle" deadline in March.

"Why rush through it and make ourselves vulnerable to those who feel they were excluded?" Dr. Ingall asked.

Others pointed out the plan has been given extensive TV and newspaper coverage, but it is just not something tailored to grab public attention. Another

man said there was nothing wrong with placing heavy responsibilities on unknowledgeable citizens so long as they are intelligent and concerned and can be educated about the law.

JOSEPH TURNER, president of the Western New York Hospital Association, backed Dr. Ingall. He raised the possibility of special interest groups packing each hearing to get their own representatives on the nominating committee.

Only eight of the 50 persons attending the hearing identified themselves as consumers, rather than providers, of health care.

Several persons said they had attended the Williamsville hearing. They could conceivably attend and vote at all the hearings, Mr. Rohrdanz conceded.

But despite some reservations, the group decided to go ahead and elect four persons to serve on a temporary Erie County Conditional sub-area Committee.

FRANK CRANE, administrator of Millard Fillmore Hospital, was elected to represent health care providers. James Newman of Hamburg and John E. Escott of East Aurora, along with alternates Paula Roden of West Falls and Cecelia Matta of Hamburg, were elected to represent consumers.

One elected official also was to be chosen, but none attended. The group decided to ask William F. Marx, a member of the East Aurora Board of Education, to serve. If he declined, they would then ask Legislator William P. Bennett of Holland, then Legislator-elect Marie Richardson of Hamburg, then Aurora Supervisor Abbott B. Henshaw.

The four, along with others elected at the other hearings, will screen and nominate 10 persons to serve on the 79-member HSA governing board and others to serve on the Erie County Sub-area Council.

Reserve of Shark Teeth

Sharks normally have five or six sets of reserve teeth behind the outer row. When a shark loses teeth, new ones begin to work forward into place within 24 hours.

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