

Paramedic project hits language snag

Description

Bilingualism barrier sinks pilot program in Edmundston – and it's not coming here

ADAM BOWIE THE DAILY GLEANER – March 9, 2017

Greg McConaghy, a paramedic in the Nackawic area and president of paramedics' union CUPE Local 4848, says he's disappointed to see the provincial government scrap one of four test sites in an advanced-care paramedic pilot project due to recruitment challenges. PHOTO: ADAM BOWIE/THE DAILY GLEANER

The Department of Health has scrapped one of four sites selected for its advanced-care paramedic pilot program because it couldn't find enough qualified bilingual candidates.

Four cities – Moncton, Saint John, Bathurst and Edmundston – were selected for the pilot program, which will eventually become a permanent fixture. But Edmundston has been abandoned because there weren't enough qualified applicants.

No new site will be chosen, the government has confirmed.

Advanced-care paramedics are highly skilled medical professionals who have completed additional training than their colleagues, who practise at the primary care skill level – a level used in many ambulance services across the country. Primary-care paramedics are able to administer 10 different medications in the field. Advanced-care paramedics can treat patients with a total of 29 drugs and perform a number of complex, potentially life-saving medical interventions before the patient arrives at the hospital.

“Unfortunately, we didn't get enough applicants in the Edmundston region that met the qualifications that would allow us to go ahead with the site,” Health Minister Victor Boudreau told the Daily Gleaner.

“We had a choice to make. If we added a new site, if we said, ‘OK, we can't do it in Edmundston, can we do it somewhere else?’ then we would have had to repost positions. It would have delayed the other sites.”

Instead, the remaining sites in Moncton, Saint John and Bathurst are moving ahead as previously scheduled.

“It's unfortunate for Edmundston that it couldn't work,” he said. “But we wanted to make sure the other sites could move ahead as quickly as possible.”

Greg McConaghy, a paramedic who works in the Nackawic area and who serves as the president of CUPE Local 4848, said it's disappointing to lose one of the four test sites.

“They couldn’t recruit enough bilingual paramedics. That was the reason.

They only had one apply who was bilingual and he lives in Woodstock,”he said. “But then he ended up backing out because it was too far for him to travel. He was the only one. They weren’t willing to post [the positions] as unilingual positions because [the site] is in Edmundston.”

McConaghy said Ambulance New Brunswick has since hired a few additional casuals for the other test sites, rather than consider moving the other test site to another part of the province.

“We figured it’d be common sense to take that site and move it to Fredericton, which is the provincial capital. Or, even in Woodstock, which could work very well,” he said. “For them to scrap it, it’s frustrating.”

Boudreau said the goal is to figure out the best way to deploy these skilled professionals within the provincial ambulance service – to figure out the best way to use their skills to improve patient care.

“Obviously,it’s my wish that once these pilots are up and proving to be successful and functioning that we’ll be able to roll it out across the province,”he said.

In an emailed statement, Michelle Breen, senior manager of projects for Ambulance New Brunswick, said she hopes to see these professionals deployed within the system in the coming weeks.

“We’re really excited about the progress we’re making on the advanced care paramedic pilot project,”she said.

“Our first group of ACPs has been hired.Their orientation will take place at the end of March, with our [project’s go-live date] still slated for mid-April.”

When the project begins,the ACPs will provide emergency coverage seven days per week,for 12 hours per day during the daytime hours, in each of the test sites.

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