

Wawanesa Doctors Call EMS Plan "Devastating"

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Glen Kirby

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Two doctors practicing in Wawanesa since 1966 are calling the provincial government plan to shut-down the community's ambulance station "illogical and devastating."

Dr. Margaret Abell and her husband, Dr. Robert Abell, want municipal leaders to ask the Pallister government to reconsider widespread changes to emergency medical services (EMS), saying, "this matter is certainly one of the most important issues with which you will be faced."

In late June, the province's health minister outlined an EMS overhaul with planned closures of ambulance stations at Wawanesa and 14 other locations within the Prairie Mountain Health region including Oak Lake, Hartney, Shilo, Baldur, Cartwright, Boissevain, Reston and Elkhorn. *Details* [here](#).

Staff will be added at the EMS station in Glenboro to expand serve to neighbouring communities losing their stations.

However, the Wawanesa doctors believe longer ambulance drive times will impact on patients' care, cutting into the "magic hour" following a trauma when prompt treatment has the highest likelihood of preventing death.

"To say that government wishes ambulance service to be within 30 minutes of all rural residents, and then state that they wish to close numerous rural services, would be laughable if it were not so serious," write the Drs. Abell in a letter to Oakland-Wawanesa council.

They are concerned the government wants to turn back the clock to a time when Wawanesa was previously served by a private ambulance based in Glenboro, compelling the doctors to use their personal vehicle on many occasions to transport patients needing urgent hospital care.

"When we came here, it was really scary," says Margaret. "There was no 9-1-1. There was no ambulance service in Wawanesa. I remember resuscitating a patient in the back of our station wagon."

The community established its own EMS station more than 20 years ago, staffed by fully-trained, on-call local volunteers. Over the years, all four Abell sons volunteered with the service. Two are now doctors.

Robert maintains the station is efficiently operated, has provided 24-7 care to the community for more than 15 continuous years and should be viewed as a model for other communities.

"Don't destroy the rural ambulance centres that save lives," he says.

Last month, a Wawanesa EMS worker similarly criticized the provincial plan. *Read more* [here](#).

Despite their plea in writing for a review of the EMS plan, Oakland-Wawanesa council took no action and filed the letter as correspondence received.

During council's monthly meeting in July, the mayor downplayed the provincial EMS plan, suggesting the closures may not happen for a number of years and would not result in any job loss within Wawanesa.

That story [here](#).

"The fact that local politicians are saying that this plan is to be implemented over the next five to seven years is no excuse to sit back and wait and see what happens," wrote the Drs. Abell, saying the plan is "a disgrace and is detrimental to all rural citizens."