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24-hour emergency room and more may come to Chiefland soon



Chiefland City Commissioner Rollin Hudson thanks Dr. Devaiah Pagidipati for considering Chiefland as a place for building an urgent care facility.

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CHIEFLAND – Five Chiefland City Commission members learned Monday night (June 13) that an emergency room has the potential of saving lives in that city within the next 60 days.

That is an extremely ambitious goal, considering that other developers never even broke ground to start building an emergency room for the past 10 years since promising a hospital would be constructed.

Another possibility by the owner of Regional General Hospital (RGH) of Williston is the construction of a hospital in Chiefland.

Dr. Devaiah Pagidipati, the medical doctor who has spent millions of dollars to bring RGH of Williston up to its current high standard of care, came with Jorge Perez, the new managing partner of RGH and attorney J.T. Lander, the RGH compliance officer, to share insight with the City Commission.

Dr. Pagidipati has success with urgent care facilities. He and his wife Dr. Rudrama Pagidipati opened the first phase of the Medicare Health Center in Ocala in the late summer of 2015.



Dr. Devaiah Pagidipati speaks to the Chiefland City Commission on Monday night (June 13).

That was the first phase of the three-phase development on Southwest 17th Street in Ocala, which is an Urgent care clinic.

And Dr. Pagidipati, who goes by the nickname of “Dr. P,” clearly explained the importance of Levy County ambulances using the

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emergency rooms in Williston and Chiefland Levy County, rather than going to hospitals in Alachua County and other counties.

Jorge Perez, the managing partner of Regional General Hospital of Williston, prepares to speak to the Chiefland City Commission.



Fifty years ago, Dr. Pagidipati said, the people of Williston and of Levy County built the hospital that is now RGH. Between then and now, that hospital was owned by people who let it slide down as far as quality.

Today, RGH is back as a clean, safe, reliable hospital. Dr. Pagidipati plans to have a joint celebration of RGH's 50th anniversary, with the start of a new free-standing emergency medical facility, diagnostic center and laboratory in Chiefland.

The RGH Emergency Room in Williston has increased from 10 to 15 admissions a month to 35 to 40 admissions a month during the past one-plus years, he said.

RGH already has a 24-hour ER. It is currently manned by physicians for 50 percent of the time and it is manned by nurse practitioners for 50 percent of the time. In the next 30 days, Dr. Pagidipati said, it will be manned 24-hours by emergency room physicians.

The people of Chiefland, he said, have strongly expressed their desire to have a hospital in that city since at least 2004.

The annual cost to maintain the ER is \$2 million-plus, he said.

He said the lifeblood of a hospital's ER is the patients who arrive by ambulance.

Levy County transports 600 patients a month to Gainesville hospitals, he said. Of those 600, there are 15 to 20 that go to RGH now each month, he continued.

"So if you want to have a hospital here (in Chiefland)," Dr. Pagidipati said, "and they take those 600 patients to Shands Hospital, then it is not going to work."

Patients from this area who need services provided by an emergency room staff, he said, should be brought to the hospital's emergency room in Chiefland, and people in Williston should go to that ER, rather than the one in Gainesville.

The hospital needs \$5 million to \$6 million in operating revenue annually, he said. So Dr. Pagidipati found Perez as a possible investor because there was a need for an economic shot in the arm from an investor.

With Perez agreeing to help RGH, there was a discussion about adding a hospital in Chiefland, Dr. Pagidipati said. Perez agreed to this too, Dr. Pagidipati said.

"We want to have a free-standing emergency room here (in Chiefland) to start with immediately," Dr. Pagidipati said. "And along with that, we want to have radiology, X-ray and diagnostics, and a lab."

Dr. Pagidipati said he spent \$2 million-plus on indigent care that he previously had intended to use to start this emergency room in Chiefland. Dr. Pagidipati said he had asked for the Levy Board of County Commissioners to help RGH by advising Levy County Department of Public Safety staff to not direct all patients to Gainesville, but the County Commission did not pay attention to his request.

If Chiefland wants a hospital, it will need support from the whole Board of Levy County Commissioners, Dr. Pagidipati said.

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“If they don’t,” Dr. Pagidipati, “then you will have to have your own EMS. You will have to bring your own patients.”

Dr. Pagidipati said that for \$5 million to \$7 million, there can be a functional medical facility built in Chiefland.

Using a very conservative approach to initiating the hospital, Dr. Pagidipati said, will make this hospital work to start. And then, if it needs to expand, that will happen in the future.

Providing good educational institutions, good medical care and good entertainment are keys to helping Levy County grow, he said.

There are 10,000 Medicare patients in this area, he said. The federal government spends about \$10,000 per-year per-patient on them, Dr. Pagidipati continued. That equals \$100 million a year that is being exported from Levy County into Alachua, Marion and Citrus counties’ hospitals, he said.

Perez told the Chiefland City Commission that he was looking for property on Monday in Chiefland to start building. This future free-standing emergency room could be one of two places – one in Chiefland and one in Williston – to send emergency patients, he said.

Perez said the plan is to build an urgent care center with diagnostic facilities, and a laboratory in Chiefland. Then, if needed, RGH will have minivans to take patients to RGH in Williston for hospitalization, and then return them to Chiefland.

J.T. Lander, the compliance officer for RGH, said RGH has the ability to build a separate free-standing ER in Chiefland without going through the Agency for Health Care Administration’s Certificate Of Need (CON) process.

Therefore, Lander said, construction of the ER part of the final hospital in Chiefland can begin now.

Once the ER is in place, Lander said, there can be a transfer of a portion of the number of beds under the RGH’s existing CON to cover Chiefland. There are 40 beds in Williston. A critical access facility cannot have more than 25 beds, he added.

Lander said RGH can bring the facility to Chiefland sooner rather than later.

Or, Lander said, the RGH effort can seek a separate CON for the future hospital in Chiefland. In the meantime, the ER at RGH is set for full-time staffing by emergency physicians, which will provide Levy County EMS crews with an option to take patients to Williston, rather than to Gainesville.

Perez explained that with telemedicine the hospital in Chiefland can be like the hospital in Arizona, which uses off-site doctors to assist when needed.

The City Council took no action but appeared to be receptive to the potential addition of a new urgent care facility in the city.