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Ellenville draws pilot health-care program

By Michael Randall

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HIGHLAND — The Village of Ellenville will be the focus of a pilot program for drawing more doctors and other health professionals to rural areas.

The program will be coordinated by Highland-based Catskill Hudson Area Health Education Center, which covers 11 counties including Ulster, Sullivan and Orange.

But as the agency's executive director Kathryn Reed explained Friday, it also will rely on the cooperation of local government, businesses (especially larger employers) and, of course, Ellenville Regional Hospital.

Reed said Ellenville was chosen as the target for the first effort as a result of a focus group in the community that showed not only a need for it but that those who lived there were willing to help, too.

Reed said it's tough to draw professionals to rural areas because of two concerns: whether they can make a living, and their quality of life. Often, Reed said, they fear being the only one of their kind in the community and thus on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The presence of the hospital will help overcome that problem, Reed said. When there's no hospital, it can be an even tougher sell.

Steven Kelley, the hospital's president and CEO, said seven or eight doctors might be needed, but that's something the program will assess. About 28,000 people live in the hospital's service area, he said.

Dr. Neil Calman, president and CEO of the Institute for Family Health, said one industry standard says there should be one primary care physician for every 1,000 people.

A \$200,000 state grant from the HEAL N.Y. program will cover the cost of consulting services provided by Reed and her agency.

mrandall@th-record.com

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