

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Projects are Moving at Garfield County Hospital**

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**POMEROY, WA** – The commissioners of Garfield County Hospital District tackled a full agenda in their regular meeting last night. Among the items considered by the Board; the introduction of an outsourced billing service to replace the current vendor, a favorable financial report, an estate gift to the district of \$15,000 and approval of a proposal to replace the hospitals phone system.

Leading the agenda for the district was a presentation by HRG, a company that will be managing the patient accounts for the district. The district made the transition to outsourced billing over a year ago. While the service has resulted in many improvements, the management team of the district remains un-satisfied with the progress being made by the current vendor. “We have made excellent movement on improving the status of our accounts receivable but it is still not good enough” said CFO Shannon Jones. “Even though we have experienced a considerable reduction in accounts receivable days, we continue to be concerned about billing inaccuracies, bills not being sent timely, and the unnecessary complexities of the process.” The new billing service has a track record of working with a number of hospitals that are very similar to Garfield County Memorial. With the approval of the new agreement the district expects to move forward with a transition very rapidly in an effort to avoid any potential disruption to the cash flow of the district. “While we have worked very hard to get accurate and timely bills out the door, some community members are still justifiably unhappy with the level of detail on bills and some delays in receiving statements” added Jones. “We take the

commitment we have made to the Board and the Community to permanently improve our billing systems very seriously and we intend to honor that commitment; that is why we feel it is necessary to find another vendor that will help us get the job done.” HRG is expected to begin work on the transition with the management team immediately. According to Jones, hospital leaders will work diligently to make the transition as seamless as possible from the customer perspective and will make every effort to keep the community apprised of the progress of the transition.

The district reported net income for April of \$115,000 bringing the year-to-date losses of the district to just under \$18,000. Although reporting a year-to-date loss, the amount is far less than anticipated. Gross revenue for the district was \$144,000 above budget and expenses were \$10,000 less than anticipated. District CEO Andrew Craigie offered praise to the staff and management of the district for doing an exceptional job of managing expenses in very difficult times. The district, which has historically operated on razor thin margins, is expecting to end the year with a slight gain. Next month the district expects to receive a favorable reimbursement from Medicare of approximately \$360,000. This payment was anticipated in the districts annual budget and is expected to help the district achieve its budget goals for the year.

Also at the meeting the administrator announced a gift of \$15,000 from the Estate of Pearl Conn in honor of her son James “Crieg” Conn. The Conn family was grateful to the district for helping the family with a medical need as they were traveling through Pomeroy several years ago and wished to demonstrate their thanks with this gift. The family was particularly grateful to Sheila Porter an employee of the district at the time,

for taking the initiative to help the family. Mrs. Conn desired that the gift be used to help the hospital continue to serve the community.

The Commissioners approved the recommendation of the Telephone System Process Improvement Team and Finance Committee awarding a contract to replace the district's vintage phone system. The project is one of four critical system improvements to the district voters approved last year. The contract was awarded to ITC Systems of Clarkston, Washington. The committee had approximately 15 phone vendors express interest in the project and 7 responses to a request for proposals. Ultimately the committee interviewed 3 vendors who bid on the project. "ITC had the best overall proposal, hands down" said Craigie. The recommendation of the committee was unanimous. ITC is starting work at the hospital this week replacing cabling that will eventually be used to carry voice and data signals though out the hospital and local clinic. The cabling project was approved separately from the phone replacement contract but will be necessary to assure the proper operation of the new phone system.

The Administrator provided the Commissioners with a brief staffing update. Physical Therapist Jonathan Harker agreed to extend his contract with the district for an additional year. "We are very pleased that Jonathan will be staying with us" said Craigie. "He is an excellent Physical Therapist." Craigie also had praise for Dr. Elizabeth Black who completed her contract as Medical Director for the District last month. Dr. Black will be replaced by Dr. Allen Ernster who will be acting Medical Director as the district continues its search for a permanent physician to join the organization. "We are very appreciative for Dr. Black's commitment to the District and we will continue to maintain a relationship with her. She has made a significant contribution to our organization and

we are very grateful for her service.” Dr. Ernster, who joins the organization this week, maintains a full-time practice in Clarkston and will provide medical oversight and clinical support for the hospital as they continue their search for a full-time physician.

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