

Six Nations Health says methadone clinic not needed here

By Donna Duric
Writer

Six Nations Health Services believes the community does not need a methadone clinic here.

Lori Davis-Hill, director of health services, told a packed council chambers last Tuesday that the community does not need a methadone clinic on the territory to treat opiate addictions.

"What I'm about to say, which is going to get a reaction, is that we don't need a methadone clinic in our community," she said. "What we need is a comprehensive treatment program that addresses addiction, mental health and pain management. This has been under preparation for quite some time. There are other ways to address this problem. These are in the works. We've done that research in our own community."

The discussion grew heated at times as community

member and business owner Gayle Whitlow explained her plans to open a medical centre in the village plaza that would also include a methadone maintenance treatment program.

A number of councillors expressed opposition and concern with the operation of a methadone clinic in the plaza.

Councillors Carl Hill and Dave Hill said they would not be supporting the location of the clinic but a decision to allow it to move forward didn't come to a vote.

Whitlow was asked to hold a public meeting to allow community members



Lori Davis-Hill

the chance to ask questions and learn more about the clinic.

Coun. Mark Hill said he was "really disappointed" in Whitlow's presentation to council last Tuesday night and said he had expected more.

"I still see no consultation," he said, adding that he was expecting Whitlow to present a business plan and bring documents proving she and her business partner Shaab Syed, a licensed pharmacist, are following the necessary regulations and exemptions to dispense prescriptions and methadone.

Syed said everyone working at the clinic will be licensed. He said there will also be security cameras and a security guard on site with a "zero tolerance loitering policy."

Coun. Helen Miller said she believes the clinic is "all about money. It's a prescription mill, like a puppy mill. I think it's just a money grab."

Coun. Wray Maracle said he was concerned about people selling their methadone to other community members.

Syed, who used to work as a part-time pharmacist at a Brantford clinic, said people who are accessing methadone clinics in Brantford and coming back to the community with their take-home doses are already at risk of doing that. "So location doesn't matter," he said.

Elected Chief Ava Hill said the idea of a methadone clinic, "has created a lot of angst in the community."

Whitlow said she has received support from some community members.

"They know there is an epidemic in this community," she said.

Coun. Melba Thomas said she was concerned about the "frame of mind" that some clients accessing the clinic may be in while children are walking to school nearby.



Gayle Whitlow and her business partner Shaab Syed met with Six Nations band council last week. (Photo by Donna Duric)

Syed said, "There is a lot of stigma attached to people using a methadone clinic. Many of the people...the reason they're coming is because they want to get better, not worse."

He said he and Whitlow plan to offer a holistic approach to health care when the medical centre is fully operational and that they

would like to collaborate with the existing services on Six Nations.

The elected chief said "We were totally unaware of what was going on there," she said.

A number of business owners in the plaza attended the council meeting but didn't express their opinions.