

Doc to open primary care practice for Memorial

By Michael Pearlman

outdoors@thesheridanpress.com

Sheridan Memorial Hospital announced Thursday that Dr. Ian Hunter will open a primary care practice owned by the hospital in mid-September. The practice will be in an office building on Burton Street near the hospital.

Hunter has been practicing internal medicine with Dr. Michael Strahan at Strahan, Hunter, and Associates in Sheridan for the past two years. Hunter said he sees this as a great opportunity to expand primary care here.

"I still strongly endorse Dr. Strahan's practice," he said in a news release. "We will remain close personal friends and care for each other's patients whenever necessary," he added.

Hospital Chief Executive Officer Mike McCafferty said the hospital's

decision to open a primary care practice reflects a growing need for providers at a time when the number of physicians specializing in internal medicine is dropping nationwide.

"What we're seeing is a decline in the foundation of primary care, and that's extremely detrimental to a rural community hospital such as ours,"

McCafferty said. "That platform of primary care is a starting point for all the health care that people receive.

"Without that base, people will choose to go elsewhere to get that initial point of service. If they go elsewhere, all the other downstream services associated with a person's health may go with them."



Dr. Ian Hunter

On Aug. 6, SMH trustees, including Strahan, voted unanimously to move forward with creating the hospital's own primary care practice. McCafferty said SMH is joining many other communities in the region that have used a similar approach.

"It allows us to keep Dr. Hunter in town and create a practice, which is extremely important to us," McCafferty said. "We can provide the support so he can really focus on treating the patients, and we'll focus on the business end of it."

Strahan said in the release that he understands Hunter's desire to make the move and that it will increase Strahan's ability to find new physicians and sustain his longevity. Strahan asked patients to understand

the decision to take separate paths is amicable and based on practical thought.

"We enjoy working with each other and will continue to do so in the future," Strahan explained. "We'll do anything we can do to facilitate the care of our patients in the community."

McCafferty said that SMH will actively recruit physicians to the new primary care practice and eventually hopes to have three or four physicians working with Hunter. McCafferty said that recruiting generally takes place while physicians are still completing their residency.

"As a community hospital, we need to be proactive and address this need by building a foundation of primary care here in Sheridan," McCafferty said. "Dr. Hunter grew up in Sheridan, and it is great that he wants to stay here and be a part of that foundation."