

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES BOARD

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Dr. Calvert Jeffers, Jr., DVM
Dr. Charles Massler, DDS
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Dr. Linda L. Petrou, PhD
Ms. Sharon Pettiford, RN
Ms. Sharon A. Rimm, LCSW
Dr. Peter Robie, MD
Dr. Ricky Sides, DC
Ms. Claudette Weston
Ms. Gloria Whisenhunt, Commissioner

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES BOARD MEETING MINUTES October 6, 2021

Board Members Present

Mr. John Blalock, Ms. Pamela Corbett, Mr. John Davenport, Dr. Palmer Edwards, Mr. Fleming El-Amin, Dr. Calvert Jeffers, Dr. Charles Massler, Ms. Heather Parker, Dr. Linda Petrou, Ms. Sharon Rimm, Dr. Peter Robie, Mr. J. Phil Seats, Ms. Claudette Weston, Ms. Gloria Whisenhunt

Board Members Absent

Dr. James Doub, Dr. Ricky Sides, Ms. Sharon Pettiford

Staff Present

Ms. Shontell Robinson, Mr. Joshua Swift, Mr. Victor Isler, Ms. Tanya Donnell, Ms. Lorrie Christie, Mr. Dudley Watts, Mr. Gordon Watkins

Guests Present

None

Call to Order

On Wednesday, October 6, 2021, the Forsyth County Health and Human Services Board held its regularly scheduled bi-monthly meeting virtually. The meeting was called to order by Board Chair, Mr. J. Phil Seats at 5:30 p.m.

Moment of Silence

A moment of silence was observed by all.

Consideration of Board Minutes for August 4, 2021

The minutes from the August 4, 2021 Health and Human Services Virtual Board Meeting were reviewed. Ms. Rimm requested a discussion regarding the statement of the frequency of board meetings. It is recorded in the minutes that the board has the regularly scheduled meetings monthly. This will be changed to state bi-monthly. Due to the impact of the pandemic, the regular meetings are held bi-monthly temporarily.

Deputy County Manager's Comments – Ms. Shontell Robinson
(Complete- detailed handouts on file in the Administrative Binder)

LME/MCO (Local Management Entities/Managed Care Organizations) Realignment

Forsyth County will be transitioning from Cardinal Innovations to Partners Health Management effective November 1, 2021. Ms. Robinson reported that the transition is going well and that meetings have been held on a regular basis with Partners and the Transition Planning Committee. From the provider's perspective, things are also going well. The biggest challenge is that when the State cuts funding, it trickles down to providers. The committee has been working trying to ensure that the state does not have further rate reductions. Ms. Robinson will be sending a letter to the state regarding ensuring rates are appropriate for Forsyth County. Cardinal Innovations and Partners Health Management are working behind the scenes transferring data. They are also making sure that individuals are able to receive the services they need, no members are dropped and providers continue to get paid.

Mr. Seats commended Ms. Robinson on a job well done throughout this whole process.

Director of Social Services Comments – Mr. Victor Isler

(Complete- detailed handouts on file in the Administrative Binder)

Embracing Automation

Mr. Isler reports that Social Services is working diligently to embrace automation.

Approximately 1 year ago, the HHS Board made an inquiry regarding tracking customers who came into the agency. Extensive work has been done over the past year and a half to review a registration system known as iiReception. The office assistants are able to register customers within the system. The agency is now ready to go into phase two which will be looking at the automation so when customers come in they will be able to look at an array of services to use as a pathway for selecting service so they can be assigned a ticket to start the process. The system should be up and running within the next 45 days. (See Forsyth County DSS-Kiosk Agency Overview Attachment for more information)

COVID-19 CPS/APS Funds

DSS has received COVID related funding for Child Welfare and Adult Protective Services which could be used around technology. Portable printers and support battery packs were ordered, received and rolled out to staff. Staff will be able to stay in the vehicle to print various forms while out in the field.

Mr. Seats received information regarding Forsyth County passing the REDA audit (Recipient Eligibility Determination Audit). FC DSS was one of the first large counties to actually go into this audit. Mr. Isler is pleased to announce that FC DSS will be released from the statewide corrective action plan within 60 days and achieved an accuracy score of 96.8%. Mr. Isler shared that he is very pleased with the staff for their hard work- KUDOS to all. Mr. Isler also recognized the Quality Assurance staff for assisting with the audit and making sure there was a continuous feedback loop to the staff.

The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)

The Act was passed by Congress in 2018. It restricts the ability to pay for residential placements on a continuous basis. Youth who are in placement at Crossnore/Children's Home can remain where they are and the 50 to 75% placement reimbursement will continue; however, when new children come into care or existing foster children are moved, a process has to be created. The Federal Government will only issue reimbursement for 14 days. The state created an opportunity for bridge funding to help cover the cost over the next 2 years. For fiscal year 2022, a projected revenue loss is expected in the amount of \$311,740.00. The state has agreed to cover 100% of this expense with the bridge funding. For fiscal year 2023, the state will cover 50% of the costs.

In the years to come, it is projected that the county will absorb the cost. This will be discussed in budget planning. DSS will begin to review trend data this month so when the budget is prepared the county cost can be projected. The overall goal with the FFPSA policy is to really push for the cease of using residential placements. Currently, the children are in traditional foster homes, with relatives or in a qualified treatment program. Over the next 2 years, the state will work with LME/MCO (Local Management Entities/Managed Care Organizations) and push to create more qualified treatment programs.

Dr. Massler asked for an update regarding changes Judge Roemer is making the way DSS is working in the court system regarding evictions. Mr. Isler responded when the Department of Treasury issues the rental assistance, they also issued best practice expectations from our local courts; please note those expectations are local rules the Department of Treasury sees as best practice. It is at the discretion of the Chief Judge. The Manager's office, FCDSS, and the FC Commissioners have been well informed in a letter which outlined those best practices regarding evictions and updates as to where emergency rental assistance applications are in the process to determine if evictions are of necessity. Approximately 3 weeks ago, the guidance was provided to Judge Victoria Roemer. Communication is needed from her as it relates to next steps. DSS has also been actively communicating with the Forsyth County Clerk of Court Denise Hines who has been identified as the liaison. Also, every other Wednesday, there is a community wide eviction diversion collaborative which Clerk Hines has been made aware of. It is the goal of DSS to provide education and a recommendation on the best practices; however, it is at the discretion of the court.

Director of Public Health Comments – Mr. Joshua Swift

(Complete- detailed handouts on file in the Administrative Binder)

COVID Update-Forsyth County

Yesterday, 87 cases were reported, today 143 cases were reported. The 14-day total is 1943 cases which brings the average to 139 cases per day. A few weeks ago, the average was over 200 cases per day which was almost over the January 2021 peak. The percent positive is 9.6% which is an improvement from a few weeks ago when the percent positive was at 15%. As of today, the total deaths since the beginning of the pandemic is 525. Since September 1 2020, there have been 55 deaths. Mr. Swift included charts to show the trend data for cases per week, percentage of positive cases, and fully vaccinated adults statewide and countywide. Mr. Swift complimented his staff on the work they have done. In Forsyth County 71% of the adult population is vaccinated with at least one dose and two thirds of the adult population is fully vaccinated.

Persons Eligible for Booster Doses

Public Health has been administering Pfizer booster doses for 2 weeks. Pfizer is the only booster available at this time. Eligibility criteria: 6 months since the 2nd regular dose, 65 or older.

For 18 years of age and older: work or live in a nursing home or long-term care residential facility, high risk medical condition, work in a high-risk profession or live in a place where many people live together. He also provided a list of additional underlying medical conditions as defined by the CDC (Center for Disease Control). Public Health has also been giving a third dose of Moderna and Pfizer for the immune comprised adults for the past 6 weeks.

Mr. Swift also reported that Public Health has been very strategic with communicating to the public and the media that individuals can go to several different places to receive the vaccine.

There are over 3000 providers with the vaccine in North Carolina. There are several places individuals can go to receive the vaccine: drug store pharmacies, Walmart or Target. Forsyth

County Public Health originally administered vaccinations to individuals from 85 counties when vaccines first became available. Approximately 100 people per day are coming in to receive the Pfizer booster. A higher demand is not anticipated when the Moderna booster becomes available which will be later this month.

The estimated date for a vaccine to be available for five to eleven-year olds is October 26, 2021. The FDA (Food & Drug Administration) will review Pfizer for this age group on October 15th. In reviewing the Census statistics, there are 35,500 five to eleven-year olds in Forsyth County. The demand anticipated is approximately two-thirds. Each hospital system has 30 to 40 providers each who are offering the vaccine. Meetings are being held with the school system in anticipation of the approval. The actual rollout will most likely be in November. The dosage sizes will be reviewed as well. The Moderna and Johnson & Johnson boosters will also be reviewed by the FDA on October 15.

Mr. Swift shared the “NC through the lens of Washington Institute for Health Metrics & Evaluation” which shows how cases have fluctuated up and down. Mr. Seats asked how accurate the studies/estimations from the University of Washington have been. Mr. Swift responded that the results have been accurate but he would be glad to go back and pull statistics.

He also responded that the delta variant is twice as contagious which started before the current school year. An increase was expected once school started; now it is starting to level off. The school system wants to do diagnostic testing for people who are symptomatic.

Ms. Corbett asked how the drive-through flu vaccine clinic is going. Mr. Swift responded that it is going well and on the first day 150 individuals drove through the Hanes C.M.E. parking lot.

Dr. Petrou asked if you should take the booster and flu vaccine at the same time. Mr. Swift responded that the best booster is for everyone is to get vaccinated. He has received notification that it is okay to take them both but he does not have supporting data to show how many individuals have taken advantage at this time. He would get the COVID vaccine first. Mr. Seats agreed and advised that you should not take them in the same arm or schedule them 2 weeks apart. Dr. Robie shared that statistics show that the COVID vaccine in general is approximately 85 to 95% effective and the Influenza approximately 60 to 65% effective. He recommends going with the booster before the flu shot. Mr. Swift reported that individuals who make it to the hospital/ICU are 99% unvaccinated.

Dr. Edwards asked how the ICU units are doing at Novant and Baptist, Mr. Swift responded that the numbers show that 57 Forsyth County residents are hospitalized in Forsyth County. The average age is 62; however, it has begun to affect younger individuals. Mr. Blalock reported that both Novant and Baptist hospitals have been at or exceeding their capacity for a while now. The COVID numbers are subsiding a little but still at capacity. One month ago, it peaked up to 200 at the five hospitals which happened a lot quicker this time.

New Business

None

Committee Update

Legislative Update -- Dr. Linda Petrou

Dr. Petrou reported that the Legislation is focusing on redistricting. No other updates at this time.

Old Business

Dr. Edwards asked if the board could continue the discussion regarding Forsyth County employees being mandated to receive the vaccine. The initial meeting to discuss this topic was cancelled.

Mr. Watts responded that the discussion was around it being a policy matter or a management matter. Dr. Ohl has offered additional guidance throughout the entire process. Dr. Ohl did not support the recommendation to make the vaccine mandatory for employees due to staffing issues. Mr. Watts offered to the board members, if there is ever a management concern about what is being done he, Ms. Robinson and Mr. Sanders-Pratt are always open to speak with them individually or as a group. Ms. Robinson shared that reason for consulting with Wake Forest Baptist Health is that they provide medical direction. The health department works under their medical authority.

Dr. Massler shared that it is a big responsibility and with all things being considered it was the right one for the county. His biggest concern with the whole issue is that the discussion process was dropped. Other board members also expressed concern around the “called meeting” to discuss a mandatory COVID vaccination for staff was cancelled.

Mr. Watts stated that this issue got hung up between being a policy or management issue. Mr. Watts apologized if he was any part of the confusion. He advised the board discuss it as management versus policy.

Ms. Corbett shared that she was glad this was addressed in order to have closure and the entire board needed to know what took place. She expressed appreciation to Mr. Watts for attending the meeting and Dr. Edwards for bringing the issue up. Ms. Weston also agreed.

Dr. Jeffers asked what is the vaccination status at FCDPH and FCDSS staff. Ms. Robinson responded that it is unknown at this time and that information has not been gathered or asked as a county. Ms. Robinson added that there has not been any spread of COVID throughout the county; however, there are significant vacancy issues with nurses and paramedic positions. Mr. Watts shared that he is pleased, proud, & humbled when he walks through departments and sees fantastic compliance across all departments even if they are vaccine reluctant or not. Ms. Robinson shared the fact that Dr. Ohl strongly encouraged the continued use of PPE.

Mr. Blalock asked how much medical leave has been taken due to COVID. Ms. Robinson responded that HR would have a better estimation.

Mr. Seats shared that he made the decision to cancel the meeting and that what he is hearing at this meeting is what is the board’s responsibility and how it should be carried out. He suggested to the board that a plan needs to be put in place and they have a lot of thinking to do before that can be done because it is not as simple as asking for a mandate. A contingency plan is needed also.

Ms. Corbett shared that it was decided to have a “called meeting” after some information was gathered for the group. Ms. Robinson shared that one of the pieces of information requested for the “called meeting” was the vaccination status of employees which added to the meeting delay as staff does not currently collect that information countywide.

Dr. Robie asked what is the status of President Biden's order that all Health Departments receiving Federal funding employees must be mandated to take the vaccination. He also asked what the follow up is regarding the OSHA directives around staff being tested weekly if not vaccinated. Ms. Robinson responded that guidance has not been received from the federal government at this time and the current OSHA guidance applies to the EMS Department (Emergency Medical Services) and does not apply to Forsyth County's Health Department.

Ms. Whisenhunt shared that her concerns were for the employees. She has seen what they have been through and what the shortage has caused. She expressed her concern about how over worked they are and that they don't need anything else to add to this crisis.

Dr. Petrou asked if all of the HIPPA laws been thrown out around asking staff if they have been vaccinated. Ms. Robinson responded that the Department of Labor has given permission to ask staff in this instance.

Mr. Seats shared that the first step has been taken by having this conversation tonight. He believes that the responsibility of the board's directives will have to come from the top down.

Mr. Watts stated, if a vaccine is legal and will work in this organization most staff would be in favor of that. He recommends voting on a light motion which would say two things:

- 1) County management would continue to monitor the feasibility of a vaccine mandate for employees, particularly those in health-related functions
- 2) Report back on monitoring those considerations that were taken.

Dr. Petrou shared that her concern is if it is mandated, where do we go from there. Dr. Edwards agreed to withdraw his motion re: mandatory vaccinations for county employees until the December 2021 board meeting. Dr. Jeffers shared that the best that can be done at this point is to advise and recommend a vaccination.

Mr. Seats supported Mr. Watts' proposal to monitor the feasibility of a vaccine mandate and have the county report back to the board.

Mr. Seats made a motion that Forsyth County management will continue to monitor the feasibility of a vaccine mandate on an ongoing basis for county employees, particularly those in health-related functions and report back to the board on an ongoing basis. (This motion will be added as an agenda item.) Dr. Edwards moved to accept the motion. Mr. Seats seconded the motion. A quorum was present. The motion carried with 13 votes in favor.

Mr. El-Amin shared that he was very clear on the responsibility of the Forsyth County Health & Human Services advisory board. A great deal of time was spent discussing the process and all agreed that we would all be ambassadors to promote the work of FCDSS and FCDPH because we are in the face of the community frequently. He shared that the word Ambassadors resonated with him and beyond that communication will have to be tightened up within the HHS Board and no one should try to override another person's position on any matter because all are equal on the board.

Ms. Weston added that she agrees and loves the word ambassador; however, the information has to be shared with the board in order to be good ambassadors.

Dr. Petrou agreed with Mr. El Amin; however, she believes that part of the problem is some of the cohesion has been lost since there have been no in-person meetings due to the pandemic.

Adjournment

Dr. Petrou made motion to adjourn and Mr. El Amin seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 7:16 p.m.

SAR/tmd

Next Virtual Meeting: December 1, 2021-5:30 p.m.