



CITY OF WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS
Department of Health & Human Services
Division of Public Health



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Matilde Castiel, MD
Health & Human Services
Commissioner

Karyn E. Clark
Public Health
Director

DATE: November 2, 2020
RE: WORCESTER BOARD OF HEALTH MEETING
START TIME: 6:30 PM
LOCATION: WEBEX / CONFERENCE CALL

Welcome & Introductions:

Meeting was called to order at 6:34pm.

Members on WebEx: Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair, Frances Anthes, Chareese Allen and David Fort
absent: Edith Claros, PhD, Chair WPDH Staff: Karyn Clark, Director of DPH, Colleen Bolen, Deputy
Director, DPH, Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH, Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of
HHS and Patricia Bruchmann, RN, Chief Public Health Nurse

Approval of the October 5, 2020 Meeting Minutes:

Motion to approve the WBOH meeting minutes of October 5, 2020 made by Chareese Allen
Seconded by David Fort -- Approved

Review and discussion of COVID19 updates and strategies to reduce spread:

Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH: Governor Charles Baker would like to have a curfew
between 10pm – 5am starting on November 6th. Limit outdoor activity to 25 people and indoor
activity to 10 people. Asking everyone to wear a mask at all times, even if you are social distancing.
We have been in the red zone for 7 ½ weeks now. There are 123 communities in the
Commonwealth in the red zone. There is a combination of 44 COVID positive inpatients, at both
UMass Hospital and St. Vincent Hospital. We are continuing to find that small family gatherings are
part of the cause for the uptick (75 cases came from 35 homes).

Frances Anthes: What can the BOH do to help? How do we expect that the Governor's new
suggested mandates will be enforced in Worcester?

Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH: Between the Quality of Life, Inspectional Services,
Worcester Police Department and Labor of Standards they will inspect businesses. If it is a mask
violation, they will have masks handy to pass out and educate them. The Population Health
Clerkship Group has helped Amy Peterson, Communications Specialist, design some public service
messages that will go up next week. I will inquire with cable services about the BOH members doing
some PSA's on compliance with these restrictions.



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David Fort: During this pandemic from March to present, what is the lowest and highest hospitalization for COVID19 positive patients that you have seen at UMass Hospital and St. Vincent Hospital?

Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH: The lowest point was mid-August. We were down to five COVID19 related admissions combined. Highest point, we had 140 in-patients at UMass Hospital. We now have 38 patients at UMass Hospital, 11 are in the ICU.

Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair: Advice on Thanksgiving?

Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH: Maximum number of people indoors should be ten. Wear a mask and social distance. Anyone traveling should be tested within 48 hours of coming to visit and tested before they go home. Christmas and New Year's will be similar. These type of gatherings are risky.

Review and discussion on plans for winter homeless shelters:

Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of HHS: SMOC has divided into two shelters: 1.) 25 Queen Street, 50 people. 2.) MLK Building, 40 people. Ascension Church and Hotel Grace, 50 people each. Working with Living in Freedom Together (LIFT) to put together a woman's shelter. I hope that this will be a permanent shelter, looking to have a separate place for women that's more trauma informed. Working with the VA on having 12 beds. Working with UMass and AIDS Project Worcester on "Stop the Spread" to see how we can get individuals at the shelters tested on a regular basis. November 9th we plan to have our first testing. Also collaborating with Family Health Center and Open Sky to bring medical care. We have three new homeless outreach workers, helping individuals get care and into housing.

Chareese Allen: Do any of the shelters have the capacity to have COVID19 designated areas?

Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of HHS: If someone is COVID19 positive, we can send him or her to one of the state hotels to quarantine.

Review and discussion on Flu Vaccinations:

Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of HHS: The Department of Health and Human Services has collaborated with UMass, Walgreens, CVS and the Worcester Public Schools to offer flu vaccinations, along with COVID19 testing, at community locations across the City of Worcester. Overall, to date, we have vaccinated 2,832 individuals. We have also gone to recovery homes and shelters. We have administered 408 high dosage vaccines to seniors.

Frances Anthes: How are we vaccinating students who are not in school?

Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of HHS: Worcester Public School Nurses are setting up sites in various school areas. Students are also going to their PCP's.

Patricia Bruchmann, RN, Chief Public Health Nurse: The Worcester Division of Public Health has vaccine available for children and uninsured adults, at 25 Meade Street, Worcester MA. Please call 508-799-8531 x33173 to make an appointment.

Review and discussion on inequality, inequity and institutional racism and the BOH:

Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair: Read the Worcester Board of Health Statement on racism, from the BOH meeting on June 1, 2020.

Chareese Allen: As members of the BOH, we are charged to protect all the citizens of Worcester. Institutional racism unfairly discriminates against black and brown brothers and sisters and is unacceptable. We need to work harder to end institutional racism in the City. We had an opportunity to open up dialog. There were recommendations drafted for the WPD and after much trying, Chief Sargent attended a BOH meeting. We were attacked by Sgt. Cipro during the BOH meeting and not allowed to respond. The CHIP is founded on three principles; 1) invest first in the community, 2) empower, listen to, and respect community voice, and 3) eliminate gaps between services. We failed as a Board at that point to actually protect our black and brown brothers and sisters. We have been told that racism does not exist in the WPD. I do not believe that. We hear “protect blue lives, blue lives matter”. There is no such thing as a blue life. A blue life is a police officer it is a choice. We say Black lives matter because police unfairly target black people. I was born and will die black; I do not have a choice in that matter.

Frances Anthes: The CHIP has focused on racism and discrimination. For a long time we had thought of this as individual acts of prejudice and individual instances of discrimination. It is only in recent years that we have come to understand what some people call systemic racism. Racism is in the systems that keep inequity moving in our society, particularly against persons of color. We have tried to look at the health aspects of it. We looked at racial disparities in healthcare. Racist assumptions based on race, often mean differential outcomes. It is very natural that we asked to start the dialog with the WPD to understand what their understanding of systemic racism was. I think it would be wrong for us to say that the public health issue ends and begins with the WPD because it is broader than that. We need to listen, hear what people’s experience has been and make some determinations about what things we might be able to change.

David Fort: It is a shame that we had to wait for some time to talk about this public health issue. It is very disrespectful to the Black and Brown communities. This is a bigger issue and extends in so many different areas. We have encouraged dialog with the WPD but it took months for their leadership to attend a BOH meeting. Sgt. Cipro ambushed us. It was disrespectful when we were not allowed to speak. We are public health practitioners and public health experts and I think that we have a better understanding of the things that need to take place in order to eliminate and mitigate public health issues, such as institutional racism and police brutality. When you have a community partner that is not on the side of the rest of the partners to try to make a change and eliminate racism and protect Black and Brown communities, it is disheartening. The Chief of WPD said that there is no institutional racism or he would do something about it. If you cannot see it, how could something be done about it? If you do not know what it is, how could you recognize it? We know that racism exists and needs to be addressed. As a Board, we have to make sure that changes are happening and continue to push. We need City Council and City Government to help us move forward.

Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair: Suggested having the City Manager attend the next BOH meeting.

Frances Anthes: This is a citywide conversation and is open to have the City Manager attend with some structure.

Chareese Allen: Welcomes open dialog with the City Manager. Suggested BOH to sit with the City Manager and city and public leaders in a meeting to make a plan. We are lacking in multicultural people in leadership positions. How do we move forward as a city and change that?

David Fort: Welcomes the opportunity to speak with the City Manager. We need to have a forum where the community is able to speak and have their voices heard. Change cannot happen unless we talk about these public health issues. Other cities are doing a lot more in a shorter period of time and we are dragging our feet when it comes to racism and police brutality.

Frances Anthes made a motion to invite the City Manager to the next BOH meeting for a conversation related to these issues. Seconded by Chareese Allen. All in favor with one absent: Edith Claros, PhD, Chair. The motion passed unanimously

Motion to adjourn; Frances Anthes - seconded by Chareese Allen
Adjourn 7:55pm

Next Meeting -- December 7, 2020 at 6:30pm

Potential Future Meeting Topics:

Plan to invite City Manager for conversation

Updates on winter homeless shelters

Updates on COVID19 and Flu

Updates on opioid