



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: December 7, 2020
RE: WORCESTER BOARD OF HEALTH MEETING
START TIME: 6:30 PM
LOCATION: WEBEX / CONFERENCE CALL

Welcome & Introductions:

Meeting was called to order at 6:35pm.

Members on WebEx: Edith Claros, PhD, Chair, Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair, Frances Anthes, Chareese Allen and David Fort WPDH Staff: Karyn Clark, Director of DPH, Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH, Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of HHS and Patricia Bruchmann, RN, Chief Public Health Nurse; City Manager – Edward M. Augustus, Jr. Guests: Sarah McGee and Randall Morse, both from UMMHC

Approval of the November 2, 2020 Meeting Minutes:

Motion to approve the WBOH meeting minutes of November 2, 2020 made by Frances Anthes
Seconded by Chareese Allen -- Approved

Review and discussion with Edward M. Augustus, Jr., City Manager, for a conversation on “inequity, inequality and institutional racism:

Edward M. Augustus, Jr., City Manager: Edith Claros, PhD., Chair will not be reappointed to the BOH, as her term ends on December 31, 2020. It is with great sadness that we mourn the loss of her husband due to COVID-19. Thanked Edith for her years of service as a BOH member. Discussed onboarding of new Chief Diversity Officer, Stephanie Williams, who is implementing many of the ideas that have come from the community, City Council, BOH and other sources. Will put them together in a way that would be coherent and would engage with the community. We continue to think about how we can dismantle the structural racism that exists in every corner of our society. It does exist and needs to be acknowledged.

Edith Claros, PhD, Chair: Thanks the City Manager, Karyn Clark and Michael Hirsh, MD for their support throughout her time as a BOH member. Has enjoyed being part of the BOH and identifying issues that have affected the community of Worcester.

Jerry Gurwitz, MD, Vice Chair: The pandemic has touched, in a very tragic way, one member of our Board, Edith Claros, PhD, Chair. Our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family. Thanked Edith for her years of service as a BOH member.



Chareese Allen: Asked the City Manager how the City is going to increase diversity officers in the City? We have noticed that there are not any people of color in leadership positions in the WPD or in the City. Going forward we can work as a team to help increase diversity and decrease systemic racism.

Edward M. Augustus, Jr., City Manager: The Chief Diversity Officer will take our recently updated affirmative action plan, implement it with the various hiring sources around City Government, and work with the hiring managers in all departments within the City. We do have some diverse leaderships within the City.

Frances Anthes: Appreciates Edith's years of service to the community. Touched to hear the loss of her husband. Impressed by the recommendations and the work of the COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force. Suggests that that kind of activity continue with the new Chief Diversity Officer. As we get the promise of the COVID-19 vaccine and as things move forward, those kinds of conversations and dialogs are going to be important. Thinks the recommendations and education coming out of the Health Equity Task Force is a strong start.

David Fort: At our last BOH meeting, we were able to talk about police brutality. Appreciates all the work that the City Manager has been doing to engage different communities to understand what the needs are. There is a lot of inequity in many different areas of the City, in terms of government and leadership. We have not had a lot of effort on the ladder, which is disheartening for the Black and Brown communities. That is more important than COVID19. There is a disconnect between the understanding of the community. People are working hard during COVID19, but we also need the same attention when it comes to police brutality. When the Chief of Police stated that, there was no racism within the Police Department that was an insult to the Black and Brown communities of the city. As the BOH, we need support from the City Manager and City Council to make these communities feel safe.

Edward M. Augustus, Jr., City Manager: Is committed to continue to move forward and work with the community to have these very difficult and uncomfortable conversations to try to make progress and dismantle systemic and institutional racism and create fairer opportunities for all our residents.

COVID19 Updates:

Randall Morse, MD, Assistant Professor of Medicine, UMass Medical School; Chief Medical Officer, Salmon Health: Staff are tested once a week, residents are tested very regularly if there are positive cases. This has allowed us to stem the explosion of new COVID-19 cases. We have better isolation precautions. Consider the impact this has had with all our residents and also the caregivers.

Sarah McGee, MD, Clinical Chief, Division of Geriatric Medicine, UMass; Medical Director, Population Health Transition of Care, UMass: Nursing Homes in Massachusetts are a part of National Nursing Home COVID19 Action Network. This program is funded by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. It is being administered through Mass Senior Care, which is an organization that most nursing homes belong to. It's an education program for the nursing homes and there are nine cohorts throughout the state. Each cohort is about thirty-five nursing homes and led by a Geriatrician and a nursing home administrator. Matt Salmon and I (Salmon HealthCare) are the co-facilitators. There are 300 nursing homes across the state participating. They are actively improving the care for residents in long term care facilities.

Michael Hirsh, MD, Medical Director of DPH: Positive cases are increasing. Family Health Center is at 22% positivity rate, Edward M Kennedy is at 34% and overall the testing that is being done at Stop the Spread sites is at 22%. We have so much community spread going on that we cannot pinpoint problem areas but we are seeing spreads begin in schools, restaurants, retail stores and factories. The Governor's order limits six people at a table in restaurants and there is no bar seating. Gatherings these holidays are risky. Loosing 14 health care providers per day to COVID-19 and its affecting coverage and the ability to do elective cases. We anticipate vaccination programs will be available the end of December for first responders, health care providers and hopefully for the health care workers that work in the long term care facilities and the residents. Once available to the general public, dispensing locations for the COVID-19 vaccine will be listed at www.vaccinefinder.org. Please continue to wear a mask, wash your hands and watch your distance.

David Fort: How are people being educated on the vaccine in order to get others in the community onboard with the vaccination?

Karyn Clark, Director, DPH: It's important to have messaging around the safety of the vaccine and benefits of taking the vaccine versus not taking the vaccine. We intend to engage in different organizations, who are in the community and have been hearing concerns around testing and getting the vaccine. This will inform the messaging and who delivers that message.

Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of HHS: When COVID-19 started, we started an outreach group, and our goal was to go out into the community and start testing individuals at various testing sites. We gave out information, masks and sanitizers. When it comes to the vaccine, Black and Latinx patients are hesitant to get in line. The key is to educate people now. Looking for help from churches and the Black and Latinx communities to talk about the vaccine and how important it is and to get it out to the community.

Chareese Allen: One of the communities I've had experience working with are the front line workers. They are also hesitant on getting the vaccine. Is there a way we are also addressing front line workers to make sure they are more confident in educating the community?

Matilde Castiel, MD, Commissioner of HHS: Yes. We are having a meeting to discuss what the approach will be.

Review and discuss updates on opioid epidemic:

Tabled to next BOH meeting on January 4, 2021

Motion to adjourn; Frances Anthes - seconded by Chareese Allen

Adjourn 8:05pm

Next Meeting -- January 4, 2021 at 6:30pm

Potential Future Meeting Topics:

Plan to invite Diversity Officer, Stephanie Williams for conversation

Review and discussion on flu vaccines, numbers last year compared to this year

Volume and types of complaints received regarding COVID19

Updates on COVID19

Updates on opioid