

CONSOLIDATED HUMAN SERVICES BOARD

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Dr. Ricky Sides, DC
Ms. Claudette Weston
Ms. Gloria Whisenhunt, Commissioner

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

BOARD MINUTES

May 6, 2020

Board Members Present

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

Board Members Absent

Dr. Calvert Jeffers, Ms. Sharon Rimm

PH/DSS Staff Present

Ms. Shontell Robinson, Mr. Victor Isler, Mr. Joshua Swift, Ms. Tanya Donnell

Guest Present

None

Call to Order

On Wednesday, May 6, 2020, the Forsyth County Health and Human Services Board held its regularly scheduled monthly meeting, virtually, via Google Hangouts. 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

The minutes from March 4, 2020 Health and Human Services Board Meeting were reviewed. Dr. Petrou made a motion to approve, seconded by Dr. Edwards. The minutes were approved unanimously.

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

COVID-19 Update

Daily Briefings

Ms. Robinson began sending daily briefings on March 18 by 11:30 a.m. When COVID-19 reached Forsyth County, the media requests increased. Ms. Robinson and the County Manager's office decided to be proactive in providing communications. Operational updates are also communicated from the Manager's Office. The main purpose is to report the new cases each week. On Mondays, more reporting is shared via an aggregate report which is provided by the Epidemiology Unit from Public Health.

Mr. Joshua Swift is also providing weekly updates on Thursdays at 2:00 p.m. during the Commissioners' Briefing to ensure more communication to the community. He also offers a question and answer session for the media at 4:00 p.m. on Thursdays.

Forsyth County Government is diligent about reporting the data that they receive from the State. There is no conspiracy behind the data. The State changes its guidance almost every day. Ms. Robinson reported that the county is very sensitive when it comes to protecting citizens' privacy.

The state has started releasing unidentified information by zip code. Forsyth County will not be issuing the information locally. The main reason is that when we have other communicable diseases such as Tuberculosis or Hepatitis A the data is not shared. It is important not to set a precedence that cannot be maintained later.

Alternative Site Location for Homeless Individuals

Forsyth County, the City of Winston-Salem and Continuum of Care members met to address the needs of the homeless population during the COVID-19 pandemic. The team is meeting two times per week to ensure resources are maximized and critical information is shared. Public Health and the Department of Social Services is leading the efforts of homeless individuals who test positive for COVID-19, are symptomatic, or pending testing. The individuals are housed in an alternative site. Monitoring and support are provided; medical care is not. It is a place for rest and healing. The location will not be disclosed. Ms. Robinson thanked Mr. John Blalock and Ms. Sharon Pettiford for their assistance in getting the site up and running. Mr. Victor Isler, Director of Social Services and Ms. Denise Price, Assistant Director of Public Health have also been instrumental in leading the county in setting up the site. The plan is for the county to transition out of the operations of the site due to the fact that it is temporary and the county does not typically provide shelter services. Public Health has been assisting other homeless shelters with education, outreach, social distancing, and cleaning protocols. The county will continue efforts even after we transition over the next 30 to 45 days.

COVID-19 Funding

Forsyth County Public Health received two hundred thousand five hundred twelve dollars COVID-19 response funds from the State. Most of those funds were spent on costs associated with the alternative site. Forsyth County Board of Commissioners approved to earmark one hundred thousand dollars for behavioral health needs that may arise due to COVID-19. Forsyth County will receive six point seven million dollars from the COVID-19 Cares Act. County Management will be working with all county departments to identify what the needs are within

the county. Public Health, Social Services and other departments will receive funds from the Cares Act as well.

Other Updates

Behavioral Health Allocation Subcommittee

The subcommittee met a couple of times. Ms. Robinson expressed appreciation to Board Members Dr. Petrou, Ms. Corbett, and Ms. Rimm as well as Ronda Tatum, former Deputy County Manager, for volunteering. The subcommittee was recommended by the full Health and Human Services Board. The subcommittee's recommendation will go to the Board of County Commissioners for review and approval next month.

Director of Public Health Comments – Mr. Joshua Swift

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

Operational Changes

Public Health has screening checkpoints set up at entrances to screen temperature and check symptoms for staff and customers. Clinics have been reduced to appointment only for customers. Environmental Health, WIC (Women, Infants & Children), Pharmacy, and Health Education has shifted to virtual services.

Public Health established a COVID-19 hot line which school nurses are assisting with. A COVID-19 page has been established on Public Health's website to give updates. In March, Mr. Swift began weekly communication meetings with community stakeholders and partners.

Liaison workgroups were created using school nurses to provide education on social distancing, personal protection kits, cleaning, staff screening, food pantries, homeless shelters, long term care facilities, and child care centers. Posters and brochures were provided to the facilities and through social media. A Spanish speaking hotline was also established.

Dr. Lindsay Novacek and the detention center staff were proactive early on. They restricted visitors, issued personal protection equipment, and started screening staff and inmates.

Public Health has also worked with the partners who provide mental health assistance such as Daymark and posted resources on social media and provided early guidance to methadone clinics in the area.

Forsyth County has had two cases; one is in a long-term care center. Public Health is working on identifying the individuals (one resident and one staff). Currently Public Health is working with Baptist Hospital and the Division of Public Health to make sure all residents and staff are tested.

In the future, there will be more testing and contact tracing across the state. The state will roll out a testing plan for each county, more information to come. Mr. Swift has a plan in place so the tracing can continue to take place in-house. If there is a need for increased demand, Mr. Swift will request assistance from other county employees, an outside agency, or CCNC (Community Care of North Carolina), which is run by the Department of Health & Human Services. Trends will also be reviewed.

Mr. Swift shared a summary of statistics for Forsyth County which identifies the positive COVID-19 tests by gender, age, and race/ethnicity as of May 3, 2020. He also shared trend data

for confirmed cases per 100,000 and the percentage of reported lab tests that were positive in Forsyth County versus the State of NC. (*Summary handouts on file in the Administrative Binder*)

Mr. Seats asked if the criteria for COVID-19 testing is being controlled or is it a moving element. Mr. Swift responded that some are moving elements but they are based on State and Federal guidelines. Mr. Swift expects that testing will ramp up. The State lab is advising that tests be given to health care workers, first responders, long-term care center residents and staff, and people who are hospitalized. The guidance from the CDC (Center of Disease Control) continues to change. More symptoms have been added i.e. chills that cause shaking, loss of taste or smell.

Mr. Seats also asked if the under 45 years of age group tested (cases) were having similar symptoms. Mr. Swift responded yes unless they were already in a high-risk category or had a pre-existing illness. Mr. Seats asked how Forsyth County is doing per 100,000 cases compared to the state. Mr. Swift responded that he would check on the rate.

Dr. Robie asked Mr. Swift what he thought about testing people who are frightened for reassurance. Ms. Robinson shared that this question was asked to Dr. Ohl, and he responded, that is not a good idea.

If you receive calls to report people who are supposed to be quarantined and they are not, contact Public Health so it can be verified. If they are a confirmed case it will be handled from there. If people express fears of astronomical amounts of people expiring due to COVID-19, they should be steered towards the CDC (Center for Disease and Control) and DHHS (Depart of Health and Human Services) for reliable information.

Mr. El-Amin shared that It may be better to have more narrative on the high number of recoveries versus the number of deaths and give a more comprehensive report. He also shared that things have gone extremely well for this county and to have a low death rate given the amount of exposure this county has had is commendable. He also asked if there is a projected date for the residents and staff of Oak Forest to be tested. Mr. Swift responded that those tests are high priority and the lab reports will be a quick turnaround (12 to 18 hours) since Baptist Hospital will be facilitating. Ms. Robinson responded that the number of staff and residents who test positive will show on the outbreak list on the state's website if there are more than two. She also shared that this information will be added to the daily briefings once more information is received.

Dr. Petrou asked if the nasal swab is being used at the Oak Forest facility. Mr. Swift responded that the rapid test gives results in 30 minutes. When tests are sent to the lab PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) is used; it is more reliable than the rapid test.

Dr. Edwards asked what is happening with Tyson Foods and is it being addressed. Mr. Swift responded that it is not the fact that it is food, it is the fact that so many people are working together 24/7.

Dr. Petrou asked if there is any indication that the virus could be transmitted to the food supply. Mr. Swift responded that the latest guidance did not show any and the higher risk is in people being together.

Director of Social Services Comments – Mr. Victor Isler
(*Complete- detailed handouts on file in the Administrative Binder*)

COVID-19 Update

Agency Operations & Public Contact

A great deal of work has been done to make sure paper applications are available as well as online applications as it relates to Medicaid and Food and Nutrition Services. The foyer of the building is open for people to pick up paper applications, the remainder of the building is closed to citizens. This is the practice for Social Services across the state. Extreme precautions are in place. On a normal day, there are between 700 to 800 people coming in to apply for services. The community has responded well and complaints have been minimal regarding how staff are responding to phone calls and paperwork that has been submitted. The staff have made the needed transitions and there has been an increase in applications particularly in food and nutrition.

Service Delivery Changes

Economic Services

Several Federal programs expended to issue federal dollars to various states so families in need could receive services. The P-EBT (Pandemic-Electronic Benefits Transfer) allows children who receive free and reduced lunch to receive an allocation of \$371.00 per child. The allotments will go out in the beginning and end of May.

Beneficiaries should be between 130% to 180% of the federal poverty level to receive free and reduced lunch. They also have to be below 130% of the federal poverty level to receive food and nutrition services if you are a child or a part of a household. To date, 34,378 children will receive the P-EBT funding; 27,660 of those children were existing food and nutrition service recipients.

LIEAP (Low Income Energy Assistance Program)

The program was closed at the end of March. The state decided to issue a one-time supplement payment to residents in Forsyth County as well as across the state who received benefits from this program during the winter season.

Emergency Assistance Funding

This is county funding that is based on a match, it is approximately \$89,000.00. These funds are split with the majority going towards rental assistance. Those funds have been depleted due to the fact we are approaching the end of the fiscal year. In preparing for this pandemic, and knowing that citizens will be challenged with being able to work, the County Commissioners decided to issue an additional \$25,000.00 for emergency assistance. A high utilization is expected.

EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) Online Ordering

Food and nutrition recipients will be able to order groceries on line via Wal-Mart or Amazon. They will be able to pick them up or have them delivered.

Automated Recertifications for FNS through May

Individuals who receive food and nutrition services will not have to come in to the agency or mail in information to recertify. The automated recertifications has been authorized by the state through the end of May. Mr. Isler projects that the June and July recertifications will be extended as well.

Wards/Foster Youth & COVID-19

At this time, we do not have adults or children who are in the care of DSS who have been directly impacted by COVID-19. They are receiving the needed precautions regarding living arrangements.

Homeless Shelter Operation Support

Operational support is continued.

Economic Services - Food & Nutrition Applications & Timeliness

In comparing 2020 to 2019 the workload has increased; March up approximately 300 cases. In comparing April 2019 to April 2020 mail-ins substantially increased. Staff has been working diligently to make sure applications are processed. Face to face decreased, online and mail-in drastically increased. Keying and approval are still required and application timeframes are still in place.

Allocations have increased based on the household size. For the month of March 2020, 5.4 million dollars was issued to eligible residents through EBT cards. Due to the allocation increases, 11.5 million dollars was issued in the month of April.

Medicaid Applications & Timeliness

Due to the loss of employment, there was a substantial increase in applications for March 2020 compared to March 2019.

Medicaid Expenditures

There was a substantial increase in benefits paid out. In March 2019, 38 million dollars was paid out compared to March 2020, where 41 million dollars was paid out. On average, between 38 to 40 million dollars of Federal funds is paid back to service providers monthly.

Mr. El-Amin asked if the recent General Assembly allocation for additional Medicaid temporary expenses has impacted Forsyth County Social Services, Mr. Isler responded that we are not clear how it will work at this time.

Public Comment

None

Wake Forest Baptist Hospital and the COVID-19 Pandemic—Mr. John Blalock

Mr. Blalock shared updated pre-assessments with the Health and Human Services Board.

Action was taken early during late February and early March timeframe. One of the first things was to establish a COVID-19 task force and a command center. The clinical capacity, escalation plans, and personal protective equipment were assessed. Staff received extra training and travel restrictions were put in place. Communication channels were established for staff in the form of a COVID-19 website. Daily calls were started with other regional health systems (shared experiences alignment on certain practices). Projection models were shared and testing pathways were activated. Structurally, created certain COVID-19 units to group patients in who tested positive. Space was repurposed to create a COVID-19 emergency department. Non-essential services were postponed.

The impact on the Medical Center as a patient perspective: Over the last couple of months, the action that the county and the state took regarding social distancing and staying at home helped to flatten the curve. Things have been manageable, not been overwhelmed with hospitalizations

due to COVID-19. The Wake system is averaging 20 to 25 confirmed cases and another 20 to 25 under test pending. The development of in-house testing has helped to speed up the testing process.

The overall patient volume has dramatically decreased over the last couple of months. Emergency Department visits have been about 50% of what they normally are. Inpatient is running approximately 70% of the normal admissions, surgical cases are at 45%, and ambulatory clinic is at 60%.

During the month of May, reemergence plans have been created for surgical and procedural cases as well as ambulatory visits beginning this week. They will be strategically planned at various locations. Wake has triaged all COVID patients to the Winston and High Point campuses in order to allow the community hospitals to be COVID free. COVID testing is required for patients who come in for surgeries. Telehealth services, video visits, and telephonic visits has worked well and will most likely continue.

A cost reduction strategy was implemented for the next four months regarding furloughs and salary reduction for the administrative staff.

Other Business or Announcements

Mr. Seats expressed that the Health and Human Services Board has nothing but profound appreciation and gratitude for the work being done by Ms. Robinson, Mr. Swift and Mr. Isler. Mr. Seats asked that the expression of appreciation be passed along to the staff.

Ms. Robinson responded that this is a team effort and she thanked the board and expressed appreciation for their support.

Ms. Whisenhunt shared her appreciation for Public Health and Social Services staff and attributes that the low death count in Forsyth County is because of the work that has been done by all.

Ms. Pettiford and Dr. Robie thanked Public Health and Social Services for the great job that is being done as well.

Adjournment

Mr. Seats asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. El-Amin made a motion and Dr. Petrou seconded.

SR/tmd

Next Meeting: June 3, 2020 at 5:30 p.m.