

**CITY OF NORWALK
NORWALK BOARD OF HEALTH
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 23, 2024**

ATTENDANCE: Frank Erlich, M.D., Janet Karpiak, M.D.; Joan McNeil, D.N.P, Theresa Quell, PhD, R.N., Norman Weinberger, M.D.

STAFF: Deanna D’Amore, Director of Health; Aniella Fignon, Project Coordinator; Megan Faugno, Special Projects Manager; Brian Weeks, Program Director of Epidemiology and Informatics; Chelcia Foster, Nurse Practitioner; Darleen Hoffer, Clinical Supervisor

OTHERS: Diane Lauricella

CALL TO ORDER

Ms. D’Amore called the meeting to order at 8:02 a.m. She welcomed Dr. Erlich to the Board.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

• November 28, 2023 Meeting

**** MS. QUELL MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 28, 2023 MEETING.**

**** MS. MCNEIL SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 28, 2023 MEETING AS SUBMITTED PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

EPIDEMIOLOGY UPDATES

Mr. Weeks shared data from the nationwide CDC COVID hospital admissions database by county. There was a mixture of yellow, (moderate level) and orange, (high level), rating areas around the country, and many Connecticut counties were in the moderate yellow level. He displayed the national map showing areas that were experiencing notable COVID cases and reviewed the preventative practices such as wearing a mask and testing as recommended by the CDC.

Fairfield County is now displaying a downward trend in both COVID and influenza cases after the peak in December. There is also ongoing wastewater monitoring in all of Connecticut. He said there could be chances of an uptick in these cases during spring break, so it’s important to monitor the data.

WORLD AIDS DAY EVENT

Ms. Foster, Nurse Practitioner, said that the World AIDS Day was held on December 1st in memory of those who have died of AIDS. A flyer was distributed both in English and Spanish and a display board was set up in the main lobby for those who came into to the Health Department. She displayed a number of photos showing those who participated in the program and also a slide of the State of Connecticut General Assembly citation for the day.

Ms. Hoffler said that Ms. Foster had done a tremendous job in assembling the program. Ms. D'Amore said that there had been previous discussions about raising the awareness of the Health Department and said that they would like to hear any additional ideas in order to schedule more events during the coming year. Ms. Quell said that it would be a great idea to hold more events like this one.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS UPDATE.

The Emergency Response Team has added 8 new members from the fall recruitment event. They completed FEMA training and hands only CPR training among other programs. Ms. Tomlinson, Health Educator, will be joining the group to speak about the "Know Your Numbers" program and a Fire Inspector will be providing Fire Extinguisher training for the staff. There will also be some training and tabletop exercises about the pandemic response and potential practices in the future.

Ms. McNeil said that she was part of the fall Emergency Response Team group and felt it was a great program.

BUDGET UPDATES

Ms. D'Amore said that the Department budget request had been submitted to the Finance Department. She then reviewed the budget requests with the Board Members and spoke about the issues involved with relocations due to issues such as fire or lack of heat in a building. The Health Department is responsible for providing services for those who are displaced. Ms. D'Amore has requested an increase in this budget line.

The Cost of Living (COLA) increases, the additional staff increases and salary step increases were also included in the budget requests. A request was included for a full time Public Health Nurse. In the past, there were a number of Public Health Nurses on staff, but over time, those positions were reduced. Now there has been an increase in TB cases, childhood immunizations clinics and other clinical services, so the need for Public Health Nurses has increased.

Ms. D'Amore would like the Evictions/Relocations position to be full-time. The staff member is responsible for relocations of displaced residents due to code enforcement activities.

Transitioning to a full-time position will enable further support in lead inspections. There have been changes in the State Lead regulations, which will increase the number of inspections and

comprehensive reports in lead case management. She said that lead response requires both a clinical/case management and environmental response.

Ms. Hoffler commented that with the influx of families arriving in the country, the childhood immunizations clinics are clearly needed in order to have the children enrolled in school.

Dr. Erlich said that as a former hospital administrator, he believes that the efforts of the Norwalk Health Department need to be broadcast widely. He noted that Norwalk is a major shopping location for the neighboring communities and mentioned that Lowes and Home Depot, both of which are located on the Post Road, are major draws. The Health Services that are provided in Norwalk are phenomenal.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Ms. D'Amore said Omar Perez Rivera is the new Community Health Worker, and he will be supporting both the clinical services and providing front desk administration support to clinics. He will also be doing some community outreach.

Interviews are underway for the receptionist position. Ms. D'Amore hopes to have that position filled soon.

The Annual Report for the previous school year has been completed. It will be posted to the website soon and be sent to the Common Council members and the BET. She thanked the staff who worked on this report.

Ms. Hoffler is currently holding interviews for the WIC vacancies with some assistance from Ms. Faugno.

Ms. D'Amore said that they were working on a tracking spreadsheet regarding the grant administration and contracts from the State Health Department. The more steps that are required in a process, the longer it takes to move it along. Ms. Fignon will be helping with this.

She added that Ms. Margaret Watt provided some Narcan training for the Department in December.

Ms. D'Amore said that there were more COVID messaging because of the high incidents of COVID in December. She mentioned that Ms. Lauricella has spoken about the increase in COVID at a recent Council meeting. The Department has been posting on Facebook and will be updated the messaging on postcards that are sent out with rapid test kits. Mr. Weeks was recently highlighted in The Hour about the respiratory viruses and COVID. The high rates of Childhood Immunizations and partnership with Danbury were also highlighted in the news.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Lauricella came forward to address the Board. She thanked the Board for hearing her comments. She stated her name and said that she had lived in Norwalk for 40 years. Ms. Lauricella welcomed Dr. Erlich to the Board and asked if they could meet to speak about messaging.

She said that she appreciated Ms. D'Amore's mentioning her recent comments to the Common Council and appreciated the efforts to improve the messaging regarding COVID and viral contamination. After listening to all of the reports over the years, she appreciates the work that the Health Department staff does. She said that she had had long time professional connections with certain staff members because she is a hazardous waste and waste management professional, which has a lot to do with public health and public health messaging.

She said she was willing to help with the messaging and would be sending Ms. D'Amore a package of suggestions. Her suggestions focus on making people on the ground aware of the simple steps they can take to reduce the spread of COVID, Influenza, and RSV viruses.

She noted that the Super Bowl would be happening on February 11th and suggested that the Health Department place posters around town such as supermarkets and other popular places of public gatherings, library, and City Hall to warn people about this super spreader event. Now that the City is holding remote meetings, the public visits to City Hall have been reduced.

Ms. Lauricella said that she agreed with Dr. Erlich about the big box stores in Norwalk being a gathering place for residents of the surrounding area who bring in their viral load. She is one of the few who still wears a proper mask at the supermarkets and other public locations.

In her professional opinion that every level of government, the Federal, State and local Health Departments are not messaging and reminding people from four years ago about the different way that COVID, the flu and RSV are spread. The general public does not know this and therefore they cannot say that it's obvious to ventilate. Ms. Lauricella said that she had been to numerous events during the holidays where adults that are smart, well-meaning and loving do not know what that means. She believes that the reason they have government is to educate the public when the officials know better. She suggested that they find more creative ways before February 11th to educate the public via the Common Council and the Mayor to help the public become aware. The little, tiny charts and graphics are interesting but they do not help the lay public.

Ms. Lauricella said that she would be following up with an email about the responses from the staff when she spoke at the Common Council meeting out of sadness. She said that she had been to this rodeo before and there is always a report of how many groups they had contact with but it is not enough for the regular folks who are middle class.

Ms. Lauricella said that while she appreciates the reports of how many locations that the Health Department had contacted, but not everyone receives WIC or other events. The regular residents are not getting the message about COVID, the flu and respiratory disease. The vaccine clinics are not providing enough information for the public and that is a missed teachable moments. The Department should be buying better masks and letting people know that they will be distributed from City Hall.

She suggested that they use February 11th as a test case. During the Super Bowl, people will be inside, laughing and shouting during the game. This is how COVID and other viruses are spread. The charts just show what has happened in the past. If a resident takes a test kit and comes up with a positive result, the Health Department isn't informed. Even though there are requests for people to contact their Health Departments, most people do not. People often just stay home. Rather than avoidance, Ms. Lauricella said that they should focus on proactivity and test it during the Super Bowl.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. D'Amore adjourned the meeting at 8:52 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services