

ERIE COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH

MEETING MINUTES

MAY 10, 2022

PRESENT:

Rob Free, Vice President, Food & Beverage , Buffalo Bisons
Baseball Canalside/Outer Harbor, Chairman BOH
Maureen Montgomery, M.D.
Dolores Funke, P.E.
Michael Merrill, M.D.
Marilyn Tuberdyck

EXCUSED:

Jonathan Daniels, M.D.
Diane Loomis, DNP, FNP
Honorable Lisa Chimera, Erie County Legislature

ERIE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Gale Burstein, M.D., Commissioner of Health
Jackie Andula, Medical Care Administrator, MPH, BSN, RN

I. REVIEW OF MINUTES FROM MARCH 15, 2022 MEETING

The meeting was called to order. Attendees introduced themselves. The minutes of the March 15, 2022 meeting were reviewed and a motion to approve them as written was passed.

II. LICENSED HOME CARE SERVICES AGENCY PRESENTATION BY JACKIE ANDULA

Jackie Andula introduced herself to the group. She went on to explain that once a year the Licensed Home Care Services Agency (LHCSA) had to advise their governing authority (BOH) that they are still in existence and have valid policies that are signed by their Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Heather Territo. Currently they have 48 patients, 7 of which are active TB cases and the other 41 are lead cases that our lead staff is seeing. This is a requirement that NYS put in place. In 2018 we obtained a license and we must have updated policies and follow all the regulations as though we are a licensed home care services agency. Jackie asked if anyone had any questions. Dolores Funke said that since she had worked at

Environmental Health she was familiar with the program. She asked about the TB cases to which Jackie reiterated that they currently had 7 cases, and have a lot of suspects, several of them are immigrants or refugees that are from Afghanistan. We have not had any from Ukraine, as they have a very high rate of multi drug resistive tuberculosis; there are concerns regarding this as refugees come into the country. The TB program has been quite busy with some staff turnover which have presented some challenges. Dr. Merrill asked what our government is doing to screen refugees for TB coming into the country. Jackie said that they come in through the refugee resettlement program and go to a resettlement agency, which is usually the International Institute. Within 90 days they are supposed to receive a full refugee assessment that includes screening for TB, STD's, parasites and stool for bacteria. Unfortunately one of our providers (Jericho Road) is taking a lot of people in as primary care patients but then not seeing the patient for six months; they have not been evaluated and could possibly be walking around with infectious diseases; and their children are not vaccinated, so they cannot attend school. Dr. Burstein mentioned checking into whether they are up to date on their immunizations as that is very important. She is also looking into closing the six month gap in care with providers.

The Lead guidelines have also changed, all lead level 5 or up cases are now being followed as opposed to the level 10 and up guidelines from the past. This started in the Fall of 2019. There are presently 41 active cases, but the staff make many more visits than that. Jackie explained that the 41 cases, the cases they count for the LHCSA, are people who have crossed the threshold into their homes for the second time, the first time is considered the patient evaluation and determining if they are appropriate for the LHCSA, the second time you cross into their house it is determined that you are a LHCSA patient.

Dr. Montgomery asked who manages the blood lead levels. Jackie responded that they go to the refugee resettlement agency, they get a social security number, then go to Social Services; they are then supposed to go for a medical evaluation. The person who does the refugee assessment would take care of the lead level and refer it to the PMD. We can do refugee assessments, but we do not do primary care. We would refer them to their primary care provider to manage the elevated lead level. Dr. Burstein said that we follow up with their primary care provider; we screen houses looking for sources of lead and provide them with assistance to repair that. We also offer education and diet for potential lead exposure information. Jackie mentioned that a lot of visits are educational in nature, and they go into houses where there is chelation therapy going on in children, the parents cannot do the therapy themselves, the nurses go in to make sure that everything is being done appropriately. These houses are getting more frequent visits. NYSDOH does come in to inspect the LHCSA, this was last done in 2018. This could occur once every three years. Jackie and Tom Muscarella in Environmental Health oversee the Lead program. Jackie works with the head nurse at TB, there are three additional staff nurses; in lead there are five nurses. The presentation was then concluded.

III. COMMISSIONER'S UPDATE/COVID 19

Dr. Burstein spoke regarding the Covid variants BA.2 etc. and said that we may be plateauing as our rate of acceleration has slowed down significantly. Although we have had 8 consecutive weeks of increases, this past week there was only a 3% increase opposed to previous weeks. For last week we had over 5,000 total reported cases. Most people are testing at home and these tests don't get counted by the State, so this is the tip of the iceberg cases that we are seeing. Our 7 day case rate is 524 per 100,000 population, up from 513 the previous week. We had 31 zip codes with high case rates over 500 per 100,000 population. We had 13 zip codes that had a 7 day case rate of over 600 per 100,000 population and these were primarily in the suburbs. The highest case numbers were in zip code 14221. The City of Buffalo comprises 29% of the Erie County population and they accounted for 32% of the cases last week. Overall last week there were under 25,000 Covid-19 tests reported to the State and this is up slightly from 24,000. Our weekly positivity rate last week was 20%, which was the same as the week before. There were increases in kids especially after spring break; this has been leveling off this past week. The schools are not obligated to conduct contact tracing or work with the Health Dept. anymore. At times we find out about a school closing due to Covid from the media calling us for comment regarding it. Last week we had 800-900 cases reported to us which does not include home tests that do not get counted. We are primarily prioritizing with people under the age of 18, our second highest priority are people 65 and up. We are no longer doing contact tracing, we call people to check in and make sure they understand about the rules of isolation and that they should notify their close contacts. Dolores Funke asked if the people contacted had positive PCR tests; to which Dr. Burstein answered some types of tests that had been reported; any laboratory based test, rapid or a diagnostic test, a lot of different types of tests. Rob Free asked what happens when someone just calls and says that they have tested positive in a home test; Dr. Burstein said that we ask them to complete a form on our website to self-report, and we are keeping track of these looking at trends. These are entered into the State's contact tracing data base but not into the surveillance data base, so they are not officially counted as a case.

Dr. Burstein went on to say that vaccination doesn't really protect against transmission, however they are very powerful in protecting against developing severe illness after being infected. A lot of people are saying that they thought symptoms were from a cold or allergies as opposed to Covid, as no one wants to quarantine. Dr. Burstein said that we are not really out of the pandemic yet, as we have not had enough experience over time to be able to predict trends except to know that when the weather gets colder rates will increase. We need another year to be able to feel comfortable to know what to expect as variants emerge. Hospital admissions have decreased unlike with Omicron and Delta when they were on the rise. Half of the people that are admitted to the hospital that test positive for Covid are admitted for another reason such as trauma, MI, stroke etc. There are very few people in the ICU or on vents with Covid. We are still seeing deaths but the numbers have stabilized. Most of the people that die from Covid related illness are older and vaccinated.

IV. OPIOIDS

Dr. Burstein said that we are still seeing significant numbers of overdoses. There are two deaths from 2021 that need to be confirmed, there will be 285 overdose deaths in the past year. Our highest was in 2016 when we had 301. Governor Hochul has been providing more resources, we now have more care opportunities, working more with law enforcement to get people into care, emergency departments providing virtual visits and getting appointments with long term providers. We have text for Narcan. We have also hired some more peers as they make a big difference in people's lives. Hopefully we can make the numbers go down again. The Medical Examiner's office has been extremely busy because of the overdoses and because of all the gunshot related deaths. This has been a huge problem here and nationally.

V. FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

Rob Free said that at the prior BOH meeting we had an in-depth presentation from Antonina Simeti and Sara Herbst. From that Legislator Chimera had further discussions and talked about getting together with other Legislators. They did have a meeting with Legislator Chimera and Johnson who represents urban Buffalo. They are trying to get the FPC on the docket to meet at a full legislative session for another presentation. Legislator Chimera and Johnson are integral in this process. Dr. Burstein suggested sending a reminder e-mail to the Legislators regarding this issue.

VI. NEW/OLD BUSINESS

Dolores Funke brought up the Sanitary Code and poor condition, small property septic systems that were done. She would like to see the way cleared for testing shallow wells that are not productive, people start to do odd things with their water. Many times there are no property transfers of these places, they are held by a family, so that the Health Department does not find out about it. Concerns arise regarding children or older people living there; there could be gastro-intestinal infections occurring from these wells. Marilyn Tuberdyck mentioned that she came across such a case, where a baby was involved, the MD treating the baby asked if there was a well and traced the illness to it. There was discussion at the previous BOH meeting of funds obtained for septic systems for low income families. Marilyn and Dolores will reach out to Jennifer Delaney in Environmental Health to offer their assistance to her in dealing with this matter.

There was no other business. The next meeting was scheduled for July 26 at 3:30, it was decided to be a virtual meeting, with another in-person meeting scheduled for September 27 at 3:30 P.M. The meeting was then adjourned.

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