Public Health Funding and Policy Committee Meeting

September 9th, 2020

Minutes

Committee Members Attending

Lou Kreidler, RN, BSN - Wichita Falls – Wichita County Public Health District

Stephen Williams, MEd, MPA - Houston Health Department – Chair

Phil Huang, MD, MPH – Dallas County Health and Human Services

Sharon Melville, MD, MPH – DSHS, Public Health Region 7

Emilie Prot, DO, MPH – DSHS, Public Health Region 11

Jennifer Griffith, DrPH, MPH – Texas A&M University

Julie St. John, DrPH – Texas Tech University

Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH - Harris County Public Health

Attendees:

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| Jennifer Sims | Albert Cheng | Seth Henderson |
| Dave Gruber | Michael DeLeon | Jennifer Smith |
| Imelda Garcia | Steve Echner | Katherine Layman |
| Nancy Ejuma | Lisa Steffek | Julie Von Alexander |
| Rafael Alberti | Gwen Sims | Elewechi Ndukwe |
| Shannon Brown | Steve Wohleb | Shelle Tarbox |
| Monique Carter | Peter Hajmasy |  |
| Angel Angco-Barrera | Shannon Richter |  |

Chair, Stephen Williams, called the meeting to order at 9:02 am and called roll.

**September 9th Meeting Minutes**

Lou Kreidler moved to approve the minutes, Dr. Julie St. John seconded. Motion carried. Minutes approved.

**Laboratory Electronic Reporting Recommendations**

Ms. Imelda Garcia stated that the Laboratory and Infectious Disease Services have been in the process of upgrading their systems. This is due to a few factors. The CDC continues to establish new requirements and amend old ones which add additional variables to the data affecting its quality. There are also many new facilities undergoing COVID testing that are nontraditional testing entities, thus trying to build up the level of education in this area is also a priority. They are continuing to have conversations with the CDC, state legislators, and health care partners to ensure data completeness and quality. Even though they are constantly communicating, new challenges are still arising such as point of care tests. The CDC is working with Abbott (I am assuming she means the Governor) to filter that information at the national level.

Dr. Phillip Huang asked about having some form of standardization across reporting sources.

Ms. Imelda Garcia answered they continue to work with TDEM and other mobile testing vendors in trying to refine the data quality issues but every lab submits different formats.

**COVID-19 School Case Thresholds:**

Mr. Dave Gruber stated that a specific number of cases will not be found as it takes away from the flexibility of the schools to make decisions. DSHS had come up with a plan named “Aides to schools” to help them in the decision-making process if an issue with COVID-19 arises. These will be coordinated with TEA and he would like to send them to the committee for review before they are sent out. The overarching goal is to give school districts as much information as possible.

Dr. Umair Shah stated that it has been a struggle trying to find a model to go by for schools reopening and suggests DSHS elevate certain practices that are being standardized.

Mr. Dave Gruber stated that DSHS does have this and it is a model based off CDC input, other state input (including Illinois), and soon TEA input.

**Local Health Department Needs and Resources**

Mr. Stephen Williams stated that a lot of the issues were with laboratory reporting and he would like to discuss where this will be heading after December 31st.

Dr. Umair Shah listed concerns with the Cares Act dollars through December 31st. He also stated that other processes are ongoing at this time in conjunction such as flu vaccinations. What will COVID-19 response look like after December 31st with all this in mind?

Ms. Lou Kreidler stated that money was in fact an issue and as well as the ability to acquire funding. She stated similar concern regarding what happens when funding runs out and LHDs are expected to continue doing these activities.

Mr. Stephen Williams and Dr. Umair Shah voiced concerns of uncertainty with the vaccine that will be coming out regarding effectiveness and efficiency of distribution in such a short span of time.

Mr. Dave Gruber stated that he agrees there are many unknowns but with multiple things happening there is enough work to prepare for what is known. Using what was done for H1N1 will be the best course of action for preparation. Mr. Stephen Williams iterated that this is a wait, see, and prepare plan.

**Data Needs/Dashboard Reporting:**

Mr. Dave Gruber stated that DSHS is collecting a massive amount of data and attempting to fuse it into an acceptable standard for everyone involved. Discussion followed with various questions around what role the department plays in regulating and monitoring labs, what aspects are being monitored, and what is being looked at from a licensing perspective.

Dr. Umair Shah stated concerns being the back log of lab data, the discrepancies in death data, laboratory reporting from private labs, and the quantification of Antigen reporting.

Mr. Dave Gruber responded that death data is based upon whoever does the death declaration and fills in the relevant information. The pace of information is a manifestation of the various types of data systems trying to be integrated to the whole. Mr. Stephen Williams asked what the department’s response would be if the committee came up with parameters for laboratories and reporting.

Ms. Imelda Garcia stated, while rules are in place there is no authority, penalty, or incentive to curtail lab reporting. We are asking for more data than normal including positives, negatives, and unknowns. There are more people submitting spreadsheets than the high-tech electronic version. To help, we have contracted with a vendor to help improve quality control of the data. Some laboratories had trouble figuring out their own IT system at the facility level. This caused a connection issue which further cause an influx of past tests. The volume of entities that are connecting and the volume of data influx has been a challenge not only for the state but also for those submitting results. Currently, we are building some monitoring components to see when labs do or do not report. There are still challenges regarding antigen test results as we are receiving them but not to the extent that we would like. The limiting factor, if it is not related to IT or electronic medical records, is the ability for those results to be delivered easily. We have onboarded a vendor to help us with some of the more technical work, and we have a maintenance vendor supporting the NEDSS system. The biggest lesson learn is being transparent.

Dr. Phil Huang asked how good the denominator data currently is for what is being posted on the website for antigen testing.

Ms. Garcia responded that we are only getting a very small percentage, but it has been increasing. We are not getting full visibility on those tests. Normally case counts are not finalized until submitted to the CDC the summer after calendar year.

**2020 Annual Report**

Dr. Nancy Ejuma stated an extension has been granted and the report is not due until further notice. We have been asked to discuss when we will begin to draft the report and for any new recommendations. Mr. Stephen Williams stated that any issues surrounding COVID may spawn recommendations. A TACCHO August 2020 COVID-19 Impact Survey Challenge spreadsheet was shared and reviewed.

Ms. Jennifer Smith described the survey structure.

Mr. Stephen Williams asks if there needs to be some standard of monitoring in labs reporting to LHDs. Dr. Umair Shah stated the lab issue remains significant. Mr. Stephen Williams describe the lab team that came down from NY and how they expedited their lab information. Discussion was held on the state to local dynamic on lab reporting and schools reopening.

Ms. Lou Kreidler expressed concern on the state to local relationship as well and the amount of time it takes for testing results to come back. Mr. Stephen Williams agreed that many of these issues seem to be tied together.

**Public Comment**

No public comments were provided.

**Timelines, Next steps, Announcements and Future Meeting Dates**

Mr. Stephen Williams asked for the timeline for the annual report.

Dr. Nancy Ejuma stated that we have an extension until further notice but a draft by December could be possible depending on the capacity of the committee to meet, create recommendations, provide the draft, and also leave time for the agency response to be prepared.

Mr. Stephen Williams would like to set up two meetings. One meeting to ground and prepare the information needed for the second meeting. The second meeting to have a more focused conversation with Ms. Imelda Garcia on laboratory testing and results reporting. Ms. Lou Kreidler, Dr. Philip Huang, and Ms. Wendy Veloz volunteered to have this discussion. Ms. Michelle Carnahan was suggested to be included as well as the participation of a small health department representative. TACCHO’s help was requested on this matter.

Dr. Nancy Ejuma stated the next PHFPC meeting will be held on October 7th at 9:00 AM. Mr. Stephen Williams would like these meetings to be held before that date.

The new PHFPC liaison, Mr. Rafael Alberti, will work to schedule these meetings.

**Adjourn**

Dr. Phil Huang made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Lou Kreidler seconded. Motion carried.

Approved:

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Stephen L. Williams, Committee Chair Date