

PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

PANDEMIC RESURGENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE

Wednesday, June 24, 2020; 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Pursuant to the Governor's State of Emergency,
this meeting was conducted solely by videoconference.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Dr. Nancy Fan, Chair

Dr. Karyl Rattay, Director of the Delaware Division of Public Health

AJ Schall, Director of the Delaware Emergency Management Agency

State Senator Bryan Townsend

State Representative Dave Bentz

Representative Steve Smyk

Mickey Carroll, Nursing House Administrator of the New Castle Health & Rehabilitation Center

Vickie Fox, VP – Director of Operations of Genesis Health Care

Dr. David Tam, President and Chief Executive Officer of Beebe Healthcare

Janice E. Nevin, M.D., MPH, President and Chief Executive Officer of ChristianaCare Health System

Dr. Joseph Straight, President of the Medical Society of Delaware

STAFF PRESENT

Joe Bryant, Policy Advisor, Governor's Office

Mary Thatcher, Deputy Scheduling Director/Executive Assistant to the Chief of Staff,
Governor's Office

Sydney Garlick, Behavioral Health Coordinator, Lieutenant Governor's Office

CALL TO ORDER

Dr. Nancy Fan called the meeting to order at 6:05pm.

NEW BUSINESS

Dr. Fan opened the meeting by welcoming members of the subcommittee and the public to the first Health Subcommittee (HSC) meeting of the Pandemic Resurgence Advisory Committee (PRAC). Dr. Fan then provided an overview of the meeting agenda. The HSC meeting materials were presented on screen to allow participants to follow along. Before beginning the presentation, Dr. Fan opened the floor for comments and questions from committee members.

There were no comments or questions from committee members. Dr. Fan acknowledged there were no questions or comments and proceeded to the committee introduction slide.

SUBCOMMITTEE INTRODUCTIONS

The HSC Chair and Members in attendance introduced themselves and provided a brief overview of their professional experience.

PURPOSE AND MEETING SCHEDULE

Dr. Fan provided an overview of the HSC strategy for developing an interim report. The HSC will look at the geographic distribution of cases in Delaware, which will feed into how the committee develops recommendation on a response and where to mobilize resources. Key measures to determine a response include demographics, location, mobility, and risk of spread. Dr. Fan stated the committee will begin by reviewing lessons learned from the COVID19 response to date. This committee will review the response from a health care perspective and review best practices from within and beyond Delaware. The next step is the articulation of goals for the state in case of a resurgence. This will lead the subcommittee to develop its recommendations for a resurgence strategy. Dr. Fan also provided an overview of the upcoming HSC meetings. Dr. Fan informed the group that a tentative date for the next HSC meeting was set for July 1, 2020 at 4p.m. Dr. Fan instructed committee members to inform either herself or Joe Bryant of any scheduling conflicts prior to the next HSC meeting.

Dr. Fan discussed HSC's strategy for defining a resurgence. The subcommittee reviewed the proposed categories to organize recommendations on how to respond under various resurgence scenarios. Dr. Fan opened the floor for comments and questions from HSC members regarding the proposed definition. No comments were provided.

EMERGING FINDINGS

The following topics and supporting data were discussed during the emerging findings portion of the agenda.

NOTE: Data current as of 6/24/2020

- Delaware's rate of COVID-19 testing, cases, and deaths are higher than US averages but below harder hit states in the Northeast
- Despite increased testing, Delaware cases increase in line with US average tests per case
- Delaware performing better than the US average in growth of COVID cases
- Delaware's path to recovery mirrors that of most neighboring states, with actions implemented on a similar timeline
- Opening early does not necessarily mean an increase in cases
- On average, states with increasing cases have less restrictive guidelines

- Delaware successfully reduced COVID-19 related hospitalizations/admissions, while deaths have begun to plateau
- The disease has had disproportionate impacts on vulnerable populations

Dr. Fan provided an overview of the data presented in each slide. During the discussion Dr. Janice Nevin raised concern about recent data on hospitalization rates and positive cases. Dr. Nevin asked if we fully understand where these new cases are coming from. Dr. Nevin mentioned that within the last 10-14 days her hospital has seen a plateau in rate of hospitalization but is concerned that it's not in decline along with the rate of positive cases. Regarding curative testing, Dr. Nevin asked if the State is tracking the positive rate in symptomatic patients versus asymptomatic patients. She also asked what quality control measures were in place, adding her concern with higher false positive rate in the test.

Dr. Karyl Rattay said the State continues to monitor the dashboards for trends. Dr. Rattay said there has been a slight increase in hospitalizations and positive cases, but not as significant of an increase in comparison to the rates at our peak, which were around 35 percent. Dr. Rattay expressed the importance of identifying a threshold to define a resurgence. The state has also increased testing which has correlations with increase of positive tests. She mentioned it is important to look at the percentage increase in positive case, in comparison to the percentage increase of test administered. In response to validity of curative test, Dr. Rattay said the test showed around 90% sensitivity. She mentioned an interest in reviewing the validity in different age groups. Dr. Rattay stated that her division has not looked at asymptomatic versus symptomatic breakdown of patients with positive test results, but it's something they could take a deeper look at. However, they see most of the positive cases were asymptomatic.

Dr. Nevin stated she felt that it's important to monitor the rate of asymptomatic versus symptomatic positive patients because it would better "tell the story" of the disease. Dr. Nevin also expressed the importance of broadening the surveillance and placing more focus on high risk populations.

Dr. Fan stated it's also important to note that symptomatic doesn't always translate into hospitalization.

Dr. David Tam asked the group if the curative test has a higher rate of infectivity; does this test show a person is more or less infectious than someone else?

Dr. Rattay indicated the State currently doesn't track the number of cycles run prior to positive test result. However, they can detect viral load. A high viral load was detected in the poultry plant population.

Dr. Fan noted the recent questions seem reflect the need to develop new matrixes, which should tell us if we are in a maintenance level or if we are moving towards a resurgence. She mentioned the need to develop different measures of resurgence for different parts of the state.

Dr. Fan asked for the group to provide feedback on the disproportionate impact the disease has had on vulnerable populations.

Dr. Nevin explained how this disease has exposed the disparities in vulnerable communities, which resulted in a greater burden of illness and more deaths. She stated, it is a “must do” that we address this as a subcommittee. She continued that the subcommittee should focus specifically on this part of our response and resource these vulnerable communities.

Dr. Joseph Straight responded in agreement. Dr Straight added that he thinks we should be looking at the education piece of community engagement. He referenced the benefit it had with the poultry industry workers in Sussex County, DE.

Dr. Tam, Dr. Straight, and Dr. Fan discussed the importance of looking at best practices in regard to messaging to different demographic populations. Dr. Tam referenced the use of messaging through radio for Hispanic and Haitian communities.

COMMENTS ON EMERGING FINDINGS

Dr. Fan presented the proposed focus areas to the subcommittee.

The proposed focused areas are:

- Manage COVID Volume
- Ensure Surge Capacity
- Sustain Health System

Sen. Bryan Townsend recommended the subcommittee look at home health care. He stated this focus area could potentially fall under the “Access to Health Care” focus area. Specifically, as it relates to negative health outcomes due to lack of access to care.

Dr. Nevin stated the group should consider the onset of the next wave of COVID-19 will occur during flu season. She mentioned the importance of considering ways to increase flu vaccinations. Dr. Nevin emphasized the importance of looking at mental health impact on the population.

Dr. Rattay noted that once a COVID vaccination is available, it will likely only be available in limited quantity during early phases of distribution.

Rep. Steve Smyk provided comment on the issues within his district since the beginning of the public health crisis. He mentioned that certain residents in his district, such as the Hispanic and Haitian communities didn’t have access to reliable sources of information. Rep. Smyk expressed interest in National Guard assisting with messaging to the community.

Dr. Tam raised a question to the group, asking how we can improve the infrastructure in support of the “boots on ground” efforts. He mentioned how well everyone from the state government to the health systems came together during this pandemic, but the concern is how do we sustain the collaboration.

Rep. Smyk suggested partnering with the Delaware State Police and their community policing efforts, to support boots on ground efforts. Information could be disseminated to troop commanders to share important information to the community.

Dr. Nevin noted that language and culture should be considered at the highest level of coordination in the state, to the lowest level. The subcommittee should look at partnerships with trusted and known members of the community.

Dr. Straight noted his concern with the start of youth sports and college students returning to campus. He expressed the importance of connecting with these institutions to track testing.

Dr. Fan asked the group if there was one lesson learned that could help us going forward.

Dr. Rattay provided comment on Healthy Communities Delaware, regarding community level support. She noted there are currently 18 opportunity communities throughout the state. They engage with community leaders to help reshape the plan around community level COVID response. They are hiring community health workers to assist with contact tracing.

Dr. Tam mentioned a need for his health system to engage and help support independent practices, specifically around testing and treating COVID patients.

Rep. Smyk mentioned the need to make sure messaging is specific. He also expressed concern with the ambiguity of messaging previously distributed.

Dr. Rattay expressed still having concern over long term care settings. She noted the rates of overdose are also on the rise. We are currently second in the nation for overdose deaths.

Dr. Fan explained the slide reflecting Delaware's current level of testing and contact tracing. Delaware ranks 13th in the nation for testing. 60% of all deaths were linked to nursing care facilities.

Dr. Fan reviewed the next slide on effective healthcare capacity. The current target areas are ICU beds, ventilators, PPE, and staffing.

Dr. Nevin mentioned her hospital experienced capacity issues in April due to people who delayed care because of COVID. She recommends that hospitals remain open during the next surge.

Dr. Tam suggested the subcommittee look at current data to develop new models to target effective healthcare capacity.

Dr. Rattay agreed that it would be helpful to have new models that look at the relationship between community infection rates and hospital surge.

Dr. Fan reviewed the access to healthcare slide. She expressed the importance of using telemedicine.

Sen. Townsend raised a question to the group, asking what the concerns were if the virus potentially changed pathology in the second wave.

Dr. Rattay responded, stating that the States current response is focused on what we currently know about the virus. They are keeping an eye on changes in the virus and have noticed small mutations.

Dr. Nevin and Dr. Tam stated it would be helpful for some type of shared communication amongst treatment providers, in response to COVID patients and how to best manage the critically ill. Dr. Nevin mentioned the CCHS Gene Editing Institute is currently looking at a COVID-19 gene strain and is willing to share information as they find out variants in the virus.

Sen. Townsend raised a point around the importance of effective community engagement and providing information to the public on the differences in the outcome of those infected by the virus. Specifically, the impact on health for survivors following recovery.

Dr. Fan stopped the presentation on slide 26 and opened up the meeting for public comment.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Denise McMullen, Vice Chair of the Development Disabilities Council, provided comment. She expressed concern with current situation in nursing homes. She shared her concern in regard to 65% of COVID deaths occurring in nursing homes, and that 75% of new deaths occur in these facilities. She is also concerned with the public at large not complying with requirement to wear masks. Need more facilities to input data into the ICS. She stated the Delaware Psychiatric Center should increase their testing of staff and patients. She added that Intermediate care facilities, nursing homes, group homes and other congregate living facilities are not required to report in ICS.

NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

The next meeting of the PRAC Health Subcommittee will be held on WEDNESDAY, JULY 1, 2020 at 4:00 PM and conducted by Zoom. Zoom meeting registration will be provided on that meeting's agenda.