



**Williamson County and Cities Health District
Emergency Board of Health Meeting
Via Video/Telephone Conference Call
Monday, March 23, 2020, 6:30p.m.
Round Rock Public Health Center
Scott D. Evans Conference Room
355 Texas Ave., Round Rock, TX 78664**

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m. by Board of Health Chair Marlene McMichael

SPECIAL SESSION

1) Roll call was taken

Present: Chair Marlene McMichael (Williamson County), Secretary Mary Faith Sterk (Georgetown), Vice Chair Ed Strout (Cedar Park), Cynthia Flores (Round Rock), Derrick Neal (WCCHD) Joanne Land (Williamson County), Terrence Owens (Hutto)
Absent: Joan Maxfield (Taylor)

Staff members and visitors present: Richard Hamala, Justine Price, Cindy Botts, Deb Strahler, Dr. Lori Palazzo

2) Consider and take action regarding the WCCHD's response and actions related to the coronavirus epidemic.

Ms. McMichael asked if Mr. Neal would be giving an update on COVID-19 as part of item 2. Mr. Neal confirmed he would provide an updated and that item 2 of the agenda would be discussed in conjunction with item 3. The purpose of the meeting, in total, was to provide additional medical director support for the current Medical Director, Dr. Lori Palazzo. As the pandemic is ramping up locally, with current cases at fourteen, and there is an expectation to continue to increase.

3) Consider and take action to authorizing WCCHD's hiring of temporary backup medical directors to assist with WCHHD's response to the coronavirus epidemic.

Mr. Neal explained that the workload has become daunting for Dr. Palazzo and to assist with her increasing day-to-day duties. The expectation would be that Dr. Palazzo would manage these individuals and delegate work to them as needed. Ms. Price reiterated that because Dr. Palazzo serves as both the Local Health Authority and the Medical Director, she is required to provide her opinion on numerous items daily. These items include control orders, consult with patients, liaison with providers, etc. This was a recommendation from both Dr. Palazzo and Judge Gravell. The recommended physicians to fill the Backup Medical Director role include Dr. Jeff Jarvis, who also works for Williamson County EMS, and would assist with how to clarify and provide quality improvements with some of the processes with First Responders. Dr. Avery, who WCCHD has already worked with and have MOUs in place with through medical students doing residencies at our agency. He may have also served as a Local Health Authority for the Health District on a limited basis in the past. Future cases will include acute cases and the need for assessment with the local hospitals, and additional duties as the surge of cases increases. She desperately needs help. Dr. Palazzo is currently working remotely and has been assigned a personal deputy to safeguard her and her home by Judge Gravell directly. Dr. Magoon is typically Dr. Palazzo's backup but is already working 10-12 hours per day at Baylor, Scott & White as a part of COVID -19 response and is concerned that she will not be able to adequately support Dr. Palazzo during this response.

Mr. Strout requested that all others on the call please mute their phones if they are not speaking, as he was having trouble hearing the speaker above the background noise.

Mr. Neal stated that based on the many emergency responses he has been a part of, the expenses of the additional backup medical directors are reimbursable. Typically, the County has a 25% match when it comes to Emergency Response dollars, but most of the response leaders in the United States are advocating the Federal Government to match 100% of the costs due to the fact that this is an unprecedented event. Ms. Price clarified that all COVID-related costs were being coded to allow for a clear understanding of the total costs of the response and because WCCHD was currently operating under a unified ICS structure with the County for the response, the costs were also being unified.

Dr. Palazzo explained that she reached out to Dr. Mark Escott, interim Health Authority for Travis County, and asked about the amount of work that he was doing and how he was managing the workload. She stated that Dr. Escott was surprised that Dr. Palazzo had only one backup and highly suggested that she procures at least two others in order to manage the workload effectively. Dr. Palazzo explained that

due to her position, there are many items that only she can sign, answer, etc. and that she has been working nearly 24-7 daily for the past three weeks. She clarified that she was grateful the Board of Health was considering this item and also clarified that she spoke with Judge Gravell, who assured her that the County would be covering the costs of these additional personnel. Dr. Palazzo stated that she gave serious consideration to the people that would serve as backup Medical Directors, as they would be representing her and the Health District and is satisfied that they will be great assets.

Mr. Strout stated that he has been familiar with Dr. Jarvis and his work for many years and supported his nomination. Mr. Strout then asked if a motion could be made or if the Board wished for further discussion.

Ms. Sterk stated that she wished to echo Mr. Strout's comments and added that Dr. Jarvis has been a strong advocate of the Health District for many years and has partnered with us on several projects over those years. She exclaimed that she was thrilled he was willing to assist in this capacity. She also added that Dr. Avery was a supporter of the Health District during the "Wilco Wellness" days and was also pleased that he was included.

Mr. Strout asked Dr. Palazzo if she thought that two individuals were enough or if she anticipated further assistance needed in the future. Dr. Palazzo answered that she thought two was enough for the time being, but if needed, staff would return with another request in the future. Ms. Sterk made a motion to approve both Dr. Jarvis and Dr. Avery as backup Medical Directors. Ms. Land seconded the motion. Mr. Strout then requested an amendment to Ms. Sterk's original amendment in which the Board authorized Dr. Palazzo to bring on up to four assistants to help with Health Authority/Medical Director duties so that staff did not need to come back to the Board with this item. Ms. McMichael stated that she believed that the Board needed to approve each Health Authority/Medical Director by name. Mr. Hamala suggested that under item 4, the Board would need to identify the names of each Health Authority or Medical Director. Mr. Strout then redrew his amendment. Ms. McMichael asked if the current motion made by Ms. Sterk was allowed to be done as part of item 3. Mr. Hamala confirmed that it could, but also suggested that as part of item 4, the appointment of Dr. Jarvis and Dr. Avery also be approved as Health Authority backup if ever needed.

Motion to approve the appointment of both Dr. Jarvis and Dr. Avery as Medical Director backup to Dr. Palazzo.

Moved: Mary Faith Sterk

Seconded: Joanne Land

Vote: Approved unanimously

4) Appoint one or more qualified physicians to serve as Williamson County Health Authority designees.

Ms. McMichael stated that based on Mr. Hamala's recommendation that if needed, Dr. Palazzo could designate Health Authority status to either of the two appointees, which would include the authority to sign documents as Health Authority. Dr. Palazzo clarified that with the delegation of Medical Director duties, she should be able to handle all Health Authority responsibilities, but appreciated that if she couldn't for some reason, the ability to delegate those tasks and responsibilities was already approved.

Motion to approve the appointment of both Dr. Jarvis and Dr. Avery as Health Authority backup to Dr. Palazzo.

Moved: Mary Faith Sterk

Seconded: Cynthia Flores

Vote: Approved unanimously

5) Adjourn.

Ms. McMichael asked Mr. Neal if there anything else he wanted to update the Board on prior to adjourning. Mr. Neal stated that in regard to these appointments, next steps would include getting the funding approved at the Commissioner's Court meeting the following day. Mr. Neal stated that those of the Health District involved in the COVID response have been working almost around the clock and he is very proud to inform the Board of the effectiveness and success of the response, which he believes is a direct result of the preparation the Health District staff. Mr. Neal also stated that he commended Judge Gravell and the rest of the Commissioner's Court for their leadership in providing for Public Health and their commitment to providing whatever resources the Health District may need. Ms. Price then gave a brief update on the operations of the Health District's COVID response, including the fact that the call center is averaging between 75-100 calls per day and that many of the staff are involved in the coordination and planning for the coming surge. Daily operations and the contact tracing and monitoring element of each of the case's contacts is also a monumental undertaking that is anticipated to only increase. Ms. Price and Mr. Neal traded off adding elements to the update, included the procurement of hotels for both COVID positive patients that may not have anywhere else to isolate and rooms for potential COVID-positive first responders and Health District employees who become ill as a direct result from their involvement in the response efforts. Ms. Price clarified that the response in Williamson County, with the County, City, Hospital and other local health agencies has been very unified and collaborative. Both Ms. Price and Mr. Neal were very complementary to the Board on the work ethic of the Health District staff in responding to this crisis. Ms. McMichael explained that in

speaking with Judge Gravell recently, he, too, emphasized how proud he was of WCCHD staff and all the work they are doing. Ms. Sterk also emphasized her pride in the efforts of the Health District staff. Mr. Owens asked if Home Health Aides were also being reached out to by the Health District due to their work with vulnerable population. Mr. Neal answered that we were not, but we investigate that in the future. Mr. Owens also asked about Hutto ISD nursing staff and if they had volunteered at the Health District. Ms. Price answered that in the beginning of the response some school nurses were volunteering in the call center, but that they no longer were, perhaps as a decision by the ISD. She did clarify that any volunteers who wished to donate their time and skills were welcome to communicate with Tim St. Peter, the Health District's Medical Reserve Corp (MRC) Coordinator.

Board Chair McMichael adjourned the meeting at 7:18 p.m.



Recorded by: _____
Cindy Botts, Executive Assistant

Reviewed by: Minutes approved on July 2, 2020, as part of the Consent Calendar. To be signed at a later date.
Mary Faith Sterk, Secretary