**Porter County Board of Health**

Tuesday March 2, 2021

Room 102A

**In Attendance:** Health Officer Dr. Maria Stamp, Attorney Dave Hollenbeck, Chairman Martin Moeller, Dr. Patrick Fleming , Dr. Derek Gasper, Suzanne Phelps, Donna Werner and Administrator Letty Zepeda.

**Not in Attendance:** Kathy Lemmon

Chairman Moeller called the meeting to order and opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Dr. Derek Gasper made a motion to accept the minutes of the February 2, 2021 meeting, seconded by Dr. Patrick Fleming. All were in favor. Motion carries.

**Announcements:**

Our next meeting is scheduled for April 6, 2021.

**New Business:**

Vice chair needed with the retirement of Elizabeth Forbes. The Commissioners appoint members to the board but we always take the initiative to see if we can find good candidates. Terry Wuletich’s name came up and we are all convinced that her enthusiasm and interest would be exactly what we would need on the board of health. Terry has lived in Valparaiso for 34 years. She grew up in Portage, and has family in Porter County. Has been with Northwest Health for 35 years starting in emergency nursing, 8 years ago took on a new role as Executive Director of the physicians practice. She works with all physicians in the practice, the clinics and operations. Has also been working with COVID a lot. Politically and county balanced. Suzanne Phelps motion to recommend, seconded by Donna Werner. All were in favor. Motion carries unanimously.

**COVID 19 update:**

Numbers are dropping which is a good sign, testing demand dropping okay sign. Positivity rates have leveled out under 10%, which puts us in yellow state map color per ISDH. Valparaiso vaccine site started 01/11/2021. Each week state has increased allocation of vaccine. We started out with Moderna. Last week got a call from ISDH asking us if we would be willing to switch to Pfizer. We had developed a consistent flow, doing about 400 doses a day in the Valparaiso site. Portage site opened about 3 weeks ago doing about 100 doses a day. The state advised that Pfizer has increased their allocation and delivery expectation a little bit higher than Moderna. In anticipation of being able to get more Pfizer and us being a stable health department, they would like us to switch Pfizer. Talked with Dave McCormick at the state as there is a little bit of difficulty in that switch over having to carry both Moderna and Pfizer for at least 4 weeks. This is so that we can get the second dose for everyone who has already received his or her first dose of Moderna. The storage for Pfizer still requires ultra-cold freezer storage. The state was talking about getting us an ultra-cold freezer, currently our vaccines are being stored at the hospital. CDC/Pfizer are looking into seeing whether the ultra-cold freeze is necessary going forward so the requirement may change in the future. Increased our number of appointments for the week to 750 appointments. Nurses are working so hard. We have a lot of good volunteers and still looking for vaccinators. First day of both vaccines with eight vaccinators, we vaccinated 580 people in seven hours. Ten vaccinators would be ideal. Second dose is much quicker than the first dose. We are using Pfizer at the Portage clinic as well. POD managers are Dan Boyd, Carrie Gschwind, and Jacobi Mack. Looking to maybe hiring a part time position as POD manager to bring our staff back into the health department. Eligibility expanding to age 50 and up, including those younger than 50 with medical conditions; dialysis patients, organ transplants, active cancers, downs syndrome, sickle cell. The State is reaching out to providers within the state with a portal where providers can report information on their patients with these conditions. The patient will get an invite from the state saying that they qualify to be vaccinated. Therefore, they do not have to show up to a site and self-report that they have these conditions. We do not have to ask them any questions on their health conditions, this protect the patient’s privacy. Johnson and Johnson vaccine has just received emergency use authorization. We were asked if we had a plan to use J&J. We initially just asked for 100 doses. We would like to get involved with a program with the state called Homebound Hoosiers. Where homebound individuals can sign up with the Porter County Council of Aging to receive the COVID vaccine at their home through EMS. The program has been developed to make sure doses were not wasted at the end of that day. We would like to have five to ten doses at a time just to give to EMS along with the information of the patient that needs to be vaccinated at home and let them take care of them at their leisure, and then for us to put it in CHIRP. The hospital is also currently using the Pfizer vaccine. Sarah Hunter is in charge of that. We have been talking about other ways we could use the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The nice things about J&J vaccine storage requirements are very minimal compared the other vaccines since it just requires refrigeration, Also it is just a one does vaccine. The hospital is looking to use it for in-patients before they are discharged. They are especially looking at it for patients who are going rehab or nursing homes, because there is a gap. Walgreens and CVS vaccinated the nursing homes, but new admissions coming in have not always been vaccinated. They want to maintain their level of vaccination at the nursing homes. Also oncology groups, newly diagnosed cancer patients waiting for treatment plans to give them their Johnson & Johnson right away before they start chemo. We also anticipate more vaccine being able to distribute we also plan to move to our current site, which is the community room in the north government complex next to our Portage office. We are looking into the community room at the Bonner Senior center as a possible vaccination site. It looks like it is going to be a good location to do that; good traffic flow, good set up, enough space etc. Probably by July 1 we should be done with these larger vaccination sites as enough doctors’ offices, pharmacies will be vaccinating, and everybody who wants a vaccine can get one. In addition, we can just give the vaccine during our regular clinic times. All employees of the health department have contributed to the effort. Four hundred people were vaccinated on Tuesday regardless of the snowstorm. Laura Blaney volunteered was so impressed and proud of our health department. What type of pressures can be put on people to get the vaccine? An employer can require an employee to take the vaccines. If the employee refuses, they cannot successfully sue the employer for discrimination, other than health, religion etc., but generally speaking that is the law at this point. What kind of psychological pressure we can put on people to get the shot. We are doing some of that already with big name people stepping up and getting shots. Seems very culture sensitive different ethnic communities resisting. Seventy-five percent of staff LJC being vaccinated. We have such a high demand among the eligible groups. When we open to everyone, we suspect it will be a harder sell to people under 40. We need to make it more convenient for them. As time will pass, they will see that the vaccine is safe. CDC will give additional guidelines for people who have already been vaccinated. Texas removing state mandate on masks. Our governor just renewed executive order, which includes the mask mandate. Private businesses can still require a mask. Flu this season is way down.

Dave Hollenbeck updated us on the state legislator pulling back roles, responsibilities, and authorities and taking them away local units of government and putting them back into the hands of the legislator. Friday was important because we were half way through the season. Many bills did not make it to the other side. Amendments can still be done though. Two bills are significate to us. The first Bill that fortunately did not make it is a bill that would make the county health officer an employee of the County Commissioners. It would have taken virtually all of your authority, and would make you an advisory board to the Board of County Commissioners, which would have them run public health in the county. Two bills that did get across and are still pending, that we still have some concern about. House bill 11-23 comprehensive bill that responses to the legislators perception that the governor has too much power. In emergency situations he should be consulting with members in the general assembly when making decisions. If it effects up locally because we get a lot of our power and authority from those executive orders. The governor as delegated to us the responsibility to deal with these issues. Senate bill 5 – right to appeal to Commissioners with a 14-day stay order. We would not be able to do anything, many not in a favor.

Motion on the floor by Donna Werner to accept claims and receipts of the previous month. Seconded by Suzanne Phelps. All in favor. Motion carries.

Letty: health department is very strapped. Kris and Sheila trying to make a budget to pay for the staff at these sites. Wanting to pay five nurses and then plugging in volunteers and our own staff. One hundred twenty thousand came from ISDH does not go very far. Having to go to HR to receive more money. Most staff at the sites are not even able to get a lunch break. Ten vaccinators would make it be able to run more smoothly.

A motion to adjourn made by Dr. Patrick Fleming and seconded by Dr. Derek Gasper. All were in favor. Motion carried.