

MINUTES AND MEMORANDA
ST. JOSEPH COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH
October 20, 2021
Regular Meeting

Present at the Meeting:

Heidi Beidinger-Burnett, PhD, MPH	President
Ilana T. Kirsch, M.D., FACOG	Member
Michelle Migliore, D.O.	Member - Zoom
Jamie Shoemaker, M.D.	Member
John Linn	Member
Jason Marker, M.D.	Vice President
Emily Dean	Member

Also Present at the Meeting:

Robert M. Einterz, M.D.	Health Officer
Mark Fox, MD, PhD, MPH	Deputy Health Officer - Zoom
Jennifer S. Parcell	Executive Administrative Asst.
Amy Ruppe	Administrator
Robin Vida	Director Health Outreach Promotion and Education (HOPE)
Carolyn Smith	Director Food Services - Zoom
Mark Espich	Director - Environmental Health
Cassy White	Director – Health Equity, Epidemiology, and Data (HEED)
Karen Teague	Asst. Director Food Services – Zoom
Neiko Rust	Director of Nursing, Immunization Clinic – Zoom
Brett Davis	Asst. Director – Environmental Health
Harrison Gilbride	Congregate Living Outreach Coordinator
Marcellus Lebbin, J.D.	Department of Health Attorney

I. CALL TO ORDER & ROLL CALL

Board President, Dr. Beidinger-Burnett, called the October 20, 2021 regular Board of Health meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

II. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

On motion made by Dr. Marker, seconded by Dr. Kirsch, and unanimously approved, the agenda for the October 20, 2021 regular meeting of the Board of Health was adopted.

III. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

On motion made by Dr. Marker, seconded by Mr. Linn, and unanimously approved, the minutes of the September 15, 2021 regular meeting of the Board of Health were approved.

IV. BOARD PRESIDENT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dr. Beidinger-Burnett recognized Dr. Marker for receiving the Boundary Breaker Award.

V. Heath Officer Remarks

Dr. Einterz noted that he just returned from Washington D.C. where he had the opportunity to visit his new Grandson and see firsthand the positive impact the twelve (12) weeks of paid leave had on the family.

Dr. Einterz then noted that the department continues to run smoothly through the COVID-19 Delta uptick and that there were three (3) items not in the Health Officer's Report.

First, the electronic medical records system implementation is put on hold. It was discovered that the system does not communicate with the vaccine clinic software and that a workaround would be costly.

Second, the Michiana Health Information Network was terminated abruptly. The network was acquired by another, larger, network. The Department of Health was aware talks were underway between the networks and the Heath Department had been assured a smooth transition should the acquisition move forward. Contrary to those assurances the Department of Health was not notified when the transition took place and it lost access to all data without notice or warning. Once the Department of Health lost access it made contact and was given a contract to join the new network, which the Department of Health promptly reviewed and returned. That contract is still being reviewed by the new network. The Department of Health has been told that its contract is "in the que", in the interim the Department of Health has no access to electronic medical records. The team is working diligently in these conditions to continue to maintain the standard of care for those served by the Department of Health.

Third, the County Commissioners have voted to turn down the CDC grant to assist the most socially vulnerable.

Mr. Linn inquired as to what the Department of Health was doing with regard to an EMR solution. Dr. Einterz responded that Athena is the most desired option, but their team has no desire to engage in discussions with us regarding the contract. The Department of Health continues to look at other options, but we have yet to find something satisfactory. While we search for a solution we continue to try and engage Athena. Dr. Marker then asked if the new information exchange had an EMR. Dr. Einterz noted that this is something the department would investigate, noting it was something the old network discussed.

Mr. Linn then asked why the CDC grant was voted down by the Commissioners. Dr. Einterz noted that was a matter of perception and that there had been some articles about that already. There were concerns about the reporting requirements, but the Department of Health has reported its statistics for years. There was not enough focus on what the grant allows the Department of Health to do, it would: improve the health of the most vulnerable individuals in our community; put new community health workers in areas most in need to assist in finding health services; would help fund the salaries of county workers, such as the Health Officer, allowing the County to devote more resources to the needs of the community; and create a track record to help with future grants.

Dr. Kirsch noted that this is the same grant rejected by Elkhart County and voiced her support for Dr. Einterz and the grant. Dr. Einterz noted that the Department of Health has had community health workers for a year, and the commissioner's rejection of the CDC grant has had a negative impact on morale within the Department of Health.

Dr. Beidinger-Burnett stated that the commissioners meeting was recorded if anyone was interested in watching to gain insight into the decision. Ms. Dean noted her support for the grant and inquired as to the date of the council meeting that was being scheduled to vote on the grant. Dr. Beidinger-Burnett responded that the meeting was at 5:15 next Tuesday.

Dr. Shoemaker asked if the reasoning for turning down the grant was the same as in Elkhart. Dr. Einterz stated we would have to go back through the recording to find the answer to this and noted that Commissioner Kostielney voted in favor of the grant.

Mr. Linn then praised the Department of Health's ACE's work. Dr. Einterz said credit went to Ms. White and her team for its leading-edge work on adverse childhood factors. Dr. Einterz then let the Board know that there is a party tomorrow for the volunteers and staff to show appreciation for their efforts throughout COVID-19.

Mr. Linn then recognized Neiko Rust, RN for an award recognizing her immunization work. Dr. Einterz noted the award and that the work of Neiko Rust, RN was noticed in Indianapolis.

VI. DEPUTY HEALTH OFFICER PRESENTATION

Dr. Fox started by saying the COVID-19 numbers have been stable over the last month. The Indiana Department of Health had a strike team in St. Joseph County. Testing numbers have also been steady and wait times for testing have dropped. Dr. Fox said hospitalizations from COVID-19 have also started to fall and they never reached the level of last year. Dr. Fox noted that there has not been an increase in COVID-19 as a result of in person stadium attendance at Notre Dame football games. This seems to match with data from other areas which have had in person stadium attendance.

Dr. Fox then noted that the vaccinee should be approved for children as young as five (5) years old in the coming weeks along with boosters for at risk populations who have already been fully vaccinated.

Dr. Shoemaker noted the emergency rooms still have considerable waits due to staffing issues. Many nurses have left the profession due to COVID-19 and the National Guard is helping in Elkhart. Dr. Kirsch noted that emails from hospital systems say that the hospitalization rate is still high in Elkhart and Marshall Counties and that the majority of hospitalized COVID-19 patients are unvaccinated. Dr. Fox responded that the St. Joseph County Department of Health's reported data is limited to St. Joseph County, which is fairing a bit better than other counties across the region.

Ms. Dean asked what was being done to prepare for flu season. Dr. Fox responded that last flu season was mild as a result of COVID-19 measures and stated that the Department of Health is unable to offer multiple vaccines in our COVID-19 clinics. As a result, individuals will need to rely on their primary care providers and other outlets, such as pharmacies.

Dr. Kirsch said Benton Harbor has lead in the water and asked if this was a concern in St. Joseph County. Mr. Espich responded that there are still a few old service lines in use in St. Joseph County, those lines are monitored and as long as they are properly treated there should be no concern until they can be replaced. Mr. Espich then noted that the EPA has a program in place requiring the monitoring and replacement of those old lines and that the municipalities in our area are in compliance with the EPA requirements. Dr. Marker then asked if Mr. Espich was comfortable with the process. Mr. Espich responded that the Department of Health does not have a say in the regulation of water utilities, which is between municipalities, the State of Indiana, and the EPA. Dr. Marker expressed concern that we need to make sure our community is safe. Dr. Beidinger-Burnett asked if we could reach out to the municipalities and Mr. Espich said he would.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business.

VIII. OLD BUSINESS

Dr. Beidinger-Burnett stated the parental leave policy was up for discussion. Dr. Shoemaker expressed his concerns that the plan is more generous than other plans and is more than what taxpayers should have to pay for. Mr. Linn agreed saying he would support six (6) weeks, which is what the University of Notre Dame does.

Dr. Kirsch asked why the parental leave plan would cost money. Dr. Shoemaker responded that employees need to fill the role of their counterparts on leave so the Department of Health would pay the person who is on leave and the person covering to do the same job. Dr. Shoemaker then questioned if a position is necessary if someone can be absent from that position for three (3) months. Dr. Shoemaker said it is a great program, but that it is too rich and that he would go along with a six (6) week program like the University of Notre Dame has.

Ms. Dean stated that she supports twelve (12) weeks. She feels the Department of Health should set the standard and be the leader in what parental leave should look like. Dr. Kirsch said that Ms. Dean's point was well taken, the Department of Health should be a leader and if the County wanted six (6) weeks then they could decrease it. Dr. Migliore fully supports paid leave but expressed reservations about twelve (12) weeks and did not think it would pass. Dr. Marker said there is lots of positive data on the impact leave has on families. Dr. Marker also noted that Department of Health employees are taxpayers as well and sending this money back to them would work as a benefit to the Department of Health. Ms. Dean noted that the financial impact on families had a canceling effect and that not providing paid leave would add to the financial hardship. Mr. Linn said if money was no object then he would be in favor, but that this was too costly. Dr. Kirsch said she does not see how it is an expense.

Dr. Kirsch then made a motion, seconded by Ms. Dean to send the recommendation of a twelve (12) week paid family leave policy to the County Council. Voting in favor of the motion were Ms. Dean, Dr. Kirsch, Dr. Marker, and Dr. Beidinger-Burnett. Voting against the motion were Mr. Linn and Dr. Shoemaker. There was an abstention from Dr. Migliore.

IX. BOARD NOTIFICATIONS

1. Hirings: Community Health Workers funded by the CDC grant.

2. Resignations: Part time nurse.
3. Retirements: None
4. Terminations: None

X. PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

XI. TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT REGULAR MEETING

The next regular meeting of the St. Joseph County Board of Health is scheduled for Wednesday, November 17, 2021 at 4:30 p.m., at the County-City Building.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

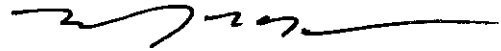
The meeting was adjourned at 5:32 p.m.

ATTEST:



Robert M. Einterz, M.D.
St. Joseph County Health Officer

Respectfully submitted,



Marcellus Lebbin, Esq.
Department of Health Attorney