



TOWN OF SHREWSBURY
Richard D. Carney Municipal Office Building
100 Maple Avenue, Shrewsbury, Massachusetts 05145

Date: January 14, 2022
To: Board of Health
From: Kerry Stockwell, Principal Department Assistant
Re: Board of Health Meeting Minutes – VIA REMOTE PARTICIPATION

ATTENDANCE: Stephen Vigeant, Dr. George Abraham, and Jennie Fishman
ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Central MA Regional Public Health Alliance (CMRPHA);
Karyn Clark and Micah Blondeau
NOT IN ATTENDANCE: Julie VanArsdalen

Confirming Member Access: Each vote taken in this meeting will be conducted by a roll call vote.

Anticipated Speakers on the Agenda: Karyn Clark and Micah Blondeau – were present and could hear.

- 1. Call to order.** The meeting was called to order at 8:08 a.m. by Stephen Vigeant.
- 2. Review and approval of Minutes from the December 17, 2021 Board of Health meeting.**
On a motion made by Jennie Fishman and seconded by Dr. George Abraham and on a roll call vote; Jennie Fishman, aye; Dr. George Abraham, aye; and Stephen Vigeant, aye, the Board of Health voted to approve the Minutes from the December 17, 2021 Board of Health meeting. Unanimously approved 3 – 0.
- 3. Review and Discuss Coronavirus / COVID-19 Update.**
Karyn Clark touched upon the daily positive case counts for Shrewsbury. This weekend, will be two (2) weeks out from the New Year's holiday. In reviewing Blackstone Waste Water reports, traces of COVID-19 in the water are starting to go down. Dr. Michael Hirsh, Medical Director for the City of Worcester, is very cautious that we are getting on the other side of this. There are a large amount of people looking for a COVID-19 test. The Mercantile Center in Worcester is one testing site that has been operating four (4) days a week. Due to the bitter cold, they cancelled the clinic on Tuesday, January 11. A couple of unpermitted testing sites have operated in the City of Worcester and in Needham. The Worcester Division of Public Health (WDPH) worked with the MA Department of Public Health (MDPH) to close down the clinic operating in Worcester and that was posted yesterday, January 13. There are a lot of logistical challenges related to testing and the Rapid Antigen test kits are hard to find. The City of Worcester received one hundred and forty-four thousand (144,000) test kits and two thousand (2,000) were given to Shrewsbury to distribute to those folks who have no access to testing, no transportation, and no means to purchase them. We are very concerned about the number of positive cases with communications teams, fire and police personnel. The hope is that we are starting to turn the corner but there is a long way to go. The number of positive cases amongst students and staff is off the chart. Everyone is trying their best to keep children in school as it is important for their social and emotional learning. This is a larger surge of positive cases than we've seen before. There have been numerous inquiries across the alliance towns and from the schools. Everyone is overwhelmed. Governor Baker's COVID-19 Orders were rescinded a while ago, and as such the locals are trying to deal with the situation to the best of their ability. Right now, all alliance towns (Shrewsbury, Worcester, Grafton, Millbury, and West Boylston) all have mask mandates in place. Approximately two hundred (200) communities in the Commonwealth have a mask mandate. We know people are frustrated but masks are effective in trying to mitigate the spread.

Dr. Abraham thanked Karyn Clark and Dr. Michael Hirsh, with whom he touches base with regularly, for their tireless work. He feels their pain. Unfortunately, the majority of patients hospitalized with COVID-19 are unvaccinated and a lot of them are senior citizens. All of them are coming in with severe illness which ties up bed space as well as the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Symptoms precede testing positive. People are often symptomatic and we're encouraging them to re-test within a forty-eight (48) hour period. Several robust studies have shown that the Rapid Antigen tests are effective and no need to confirm via a PCR test. The Rapid Antigen tests are being taken as a true positive result. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) keeps changing their guidelines. This year, COVID-19 nailed the healthcare workers. We are down nurses and staff on a daily basis. Two (2) employees may return and then three (3) got out sick and their family members are acquiring it.

Staff are being asked to long hours and the healthcare system is overcrowded.

On a national level, new variants are being monitored. We don't think it will ever go away but eventually, it might behave like the seasonal flu. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) recommends a primary series of a COVID-19 vaccine to be considered fully vaccinated; however, fully vaccinated implies three (3) doses, not two (2). There is a lot of moving parts and a great deal of information. Getting folks vaccinated on a global scale is key.

Question: Is there any update on COVID-19 long-haulers and being vaccinated?

Answer: Excellent question! Publications that have been recently released show that people who are vaccinated have shorter long-hauler illness than folks who are unvaccinated. Some symptoms include the loss of smell or taste, shortness of breath, gastrointestinal (GI) symptoms, etc. The inflammatory phenomenon is it affects some folks but not others. What are all the factors? No one has a clear answer. This is a valid point in why vaccination is a benefit.

Question: What is the status of hospital admittances? Are they at their breaking point?

Answer: Yes, in many ways. Patients who require elective or not emergent procedures have been put on the back burner for the time being. Hospitals have dialed back their surgeries to a third in order to accommodate bed space for COVID-19 patients. Visitation has been put on hold other than end-of-life care and a few other situations. No routine visitation is allowed which aids in decreasing disease being brought into the institution.

Karyn Clark thanked Dr. Abraham for everything he's doing and well as Dr. Michael Hirsh, Medical Director for the City of Worcester. The level of exhaustion is high and the fatigue is real. She wanted to acknowledge everyone at the hospital as well. On the local level, the City of Worcester provides Public Health Nurse services to the Town of Shrewsbury. Despite being down one (1) nurse due to a family emergency, they have still been able to support employees, COVID-19 vaccination/booster clinics. Pat Bruchmann and Amelia Houghton have done a tremendous amount of work. They have been vaccinating at the schools and then returning to those same schools to administer the booster shots. Pat and Amelia have administered over two thousand (2,000) doses of the COVID-19 vaccine between schools and employees. As children have become eligible to receive the vaccine, there has been more of a demand for their time. Karyn wanted to acknowledge them for all the work they do, working incredibly long hours, and putting themselves at risk. She also acknowledged Micah Blondeau and Julie VanArsdalen for their follow-up on mask non-compliance complaints and Kerry Stockwell for fielding the large volume of COVID-19 related telephone calls and emails that come into the Health Department. It's been quite a challenge to collect, synthesize, and communicate the constant change in guidance from both the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the MA Department of Public Health (MDPH). Public Health folks are burnt out and it takes several eyes to look over the information to ensure it's accurate in conveying to the public and influencing employee policy. She is appreciative of the support she's received from the Board of Health.

4. Review and Act on the Report from the Central Massachusetts Regional Public Health Alliance (CMRPHA)

Micah Blondeau continues to follow up on mask complaints. Three (3) restaurants had to close due to staff being stricken with COVID-19. He has been assisting those establishments with guidance and their reopening. The Health Department in conjunction with the local businesses are doing their very best in trying to get customers to mask up in a non-confrontational way. Several other communities now have a mask order in place and that should assist Shrewsbury in this effort.

5. Review meeting schedule. The next scheduled Board of Health meeting will be held on February 18, 2022 at 8:00 a.m. via Remote Participation.

6. Adjourn. Dr. George Abraham made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:29 a.m., seconded by Jennie Fishman and on a roll call vote; Jennie Fishman aye; Dr. George Abraham, aye; and Stephen Vigeant, aye. Unanimously approved 3– 0.

Correspondence:

- Board of Health Meeting Minutes – December 17, 2021
- CMRPHA Updates – January 2022