

**KITSAP PUBLIC HEALTH BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
Special Meeting
September 28, 2021**

The meeting was called to order by Board Chair, Commissioner Charlotte Garrido at 11:00 a.m.

COVID-19 UPDATE: CURRENT IMPACTS TO LOCAL HEALTHCARE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES IN KITSAP COUNTY

Dr. Gib Morrow, Health Officer, shared a presentation with the board regarding recent COVID-19 disease activity in Kitsap, which has remained at a high level. In his slides, he showed the board that all subregions of the county, except Bainbridge Island, are in the high transmission range and said hospitalizations and deaths are currently in their highest peak during the pandemic. He noted that people aged 40 and younger are 25% of new hospital admissions. Dr. Morrow shared that there are 37 active outbreaks and 11 long term care outbreaks within Kitsap County.

Dr. Morrow introduced Mr. John Oliver, Fire Chief of Central Kitsap Fire and Rescue (CKFR), to speak to the board about current issues caused by Covid-19.

Mr. Oliver said CKFR serves about 75 thousand citizens. He said, as fire and emergency medical services they try to follow national standard, which is attempting to put a first responder in your home within 4 minutes. He explained that another national standard that CKFR attempts to meet is to put an advanced life support paramedic in your home in less than 8 minutes. This comes from strategically staffed stations within the Kitsap Peninsula. Mr. Oliver said a difficulty this creates is that those units are a dual role: there are stations that serve firefighters and emergency medical services (EMS) at the same time. When those stations are out of service, CKFR can't meet the time of service required by the national standard. He explained that this is due to the hospital load and shared an anecdote of a unit tied up at the hospital for hours waiting to offload the patient to the emergency department and move on to their next patient. That could mean that one third of the paramedic workforce could be at the hospital attempting to drop off a patient. Mr. Oliver said this is a community health emergency, with units tied up at the hospital reducing the standard of coverage that citizens deserve and expect. He stressed that CKFR needs to be able to free those crews up so they can better serve our systems. Mr. Oliver introduced Chief Jim Gillard from the Poulsbo Fire Department.

Chief Gillard shared metrics of wait times at the St. Michael Medical Center (SMMC) emergency department. He said crews started hearing stories in July about long wait times, so Poulsbo Fire Department began tracking emergency department times with their crews. He stressed that these long wait times are causing tragic stories daily for the crews and their ability to provide service to our citizens.

Dr. David Weiss, Associate Chief Medical Officer at SMMC, said SMMC has been working closely with the aid and medics over time. Dr. Weiss said SMMC staff are wearing protective equipment, which includes a filtration system. He shared that this morning there were 42 Covid-19 patients hospitalized at SMMC and there are 177 patients total in the hospital system. He said this is down from 65 COVID-19 patients last week. Dr. Weiss explained that these patients are very sick, and they get sick very quickly with rapid onset. He explained that Kitsap Public Health

COVID-19 cases are slightly on the downslope with reduced numbers at SMMC and other facilities. He said Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data shows data the states with the lowest vaccination rates have the highest COVID-19 hospitalization rates. Of the 65 patients in SMMC with Covid (25% of their census) last week, 83% of those patients were not fully vaccinated. SMMC is still screening employees daily for signs and symptoms. There is currently a tent outside the SMMC emergency department functioning as an expanded waiting room. Dr. Weiss said staff get reassigned to areas to meet demands. He said, like other facilities around the country there are health care staffing shortages.

Elizabeth Klute, Director of Kitsap County Department of Emergency Management (DEM), shared with the board that the Emergency Operations Center has been in full activation since March of 2020. They run the quarantine site with about 40 people in quarantine at their isolation site. There are about 5-6 people daily who have moved to a hotel for quarantine basis. They have also been running Bremerton, South Kitsap, Bainbridge, and Poulsbo testing sites. DEM has now ramped back up and is supporting the Health District at vaccination clinics and some pop-ups around the county. They have also been distributing PPE, testing and modular fashion tents. She said DEM has lots of materials for the community to help support. They have a medical reserve corps with about 800 members from all different medical backgrounds. She said they also provide wrap around services and stress management services.

BOARD Q & A AND DISCUSSION

Chair Garrido opened the floor to a question-and-answer session and thanked the guest speakers.

Commissioner Ed Wolfe said vaccines work and said there is a potential for exposure everywhere anyone goes. He said commercial businesses and restaurants have been hurt significantly during the pandemic, including creating risk to other key services. Commissioner Wolfe suggested that the board needs to consider its actions carefully. Every jurisdiction is facing severe hiring challenges. Commissioner Wolfe asked Dr. Morrow, of the county's recent outbreaks, how many were in long term care facilities? How many of those are government facilities?

Dr. Morrow replied that there are 11 outbreaks in long term care facilities with significant outbreaks including dozens of residents. He said 184 residents have tested positive for COVID-19 in the last month and 58 staff have tested positive. He noted these cases are often introduced by unvaccinated staff. Additionally, he said there are four congregate living situations with 54 residents, two current health care facility outbreaks, eight schools and at least 11 government agency (jail facilities included) outbreaks. Dr. Morrow shared that nearly 10% among the vulnerable elderly group who have been infected have passed away. This is happening among both unvaccinated staff and fully vaccinated residents. He noted the residents don't appear to be getting as sick as they were in January and February. He added that currently it is the younger age groups that have higher COVID-19 rates in the county.

Mayor Becky Erickson asked Dr. Weiss if SMMC has been in a situation where they have had to prioritize care by picking and choosing who got treatment? Dr. Weiss replied that patients get

triaged for care at SMMC every day. He said this is a typical part of any emergency department. He let the board know that when someone presents for care they're triaged to different levels of care. He said SMMC has restricted scheduled elective surgeries until the patient census comes down. This is dependent on how long they can wait and how bad their condition is.

Mayor Erickson asked Dr. Weiss if SMMC is in a situation where they don't have enough capacity in emergency response. Dr. Weiss replied that he doesn't have an answer regarding emergency response but said there are certain things that happen with certain patients. For example, he said, if someone is having a heart attack that patient would go to the catheterization lab and that service hasn't been impacted. He said SMMC will transfer patients to a different hospital if they have an impacted capacity.

Major Erickson asked Chief Oliver if CKFR crews have had to divert people to other hospitals and if so, how often does that happen and where do Kitsap residents get taken to? Chief Oliver said his crews have been diverted to Tacoma, Seattle, and a handful of other hospitals. He said, during the heat wave, diversion to another hospital was denied because everyone was overwhelmed. Chief Oliver said the mandatory vaccination is one issue, but there is also the issue of an earthquake or airplane crash. He said Fire and EMS have plans with DEM to make sure all those people are treated in the hospital. The EMS has surges that cannot be anticipated or staffed. Chief Oliver told the board there are resources available to help relieve Fire and EMS in this time and requested the board consider activating those resources. Chief Oliver asked the Health Board to empower and mobilize the DEM and develop a medical surge plan.

Chief Gillard told the board this isn't a COVID-19 issue, this is a massive impact to our healthcare system that impacts emergency room and EMS. Chief Gillard explained that at times they are down to six beds designated for EMS drop offs in the emergency department. He said the emergency department needs increased capacity and help. He said DEM can set up a triage center to support that department, take some of the load and help with some assistance for the emergency department.

Ms. Klute replied to Dr. Weiss' statement saying DEM has struggled with using transportation services with Olympic Ambulance where that had a patient that needed to go to the ICU waiting for 5 hours to get back to quarantine and isolation. DEM has had to find private transportation and put additional people at unnecessary risk.

Deputy Mayor Kirsten Hytopoulos told the board she hopes they don't need any more evidence that this is a dire public health emergency. She asked Dr. Morrow what the board can do today to help. Dr. Morrow replied that he needs direction from the board for next steps. Kitsap Health District has implemented its own vaccination requirement to protect our workers and people that the District serves. Dr. Morrow stressed that the Health Board needs to walk the walk, imposing mandates on their own agencies is leading by example and is necessary. Dr. Morrow agreed with Commissioner Wolfe that putting this as a governmental imposition on small businesses puts everyone in a hard position. He reiterated to the board that mandates work. Dr. Morrow expressed his gratitude to all the military members who are required to get vaccinated and have done so. The mandates have required our military service members, health care workers,

teachers, staff in schools, and state government employees get vaccinated. Dr. Morrow stressed that we need to lead by example.

Commissioner Rob Gelder asked Dr. Weiss, what impact vaccine mandates has had on SMMC staffing. Dr. Weiss responded that SMMC intends to be in full compliance with the Governor's mandate by October 18th. Dr. Morrow and SMMC have worked together with SMMC staff creating health forums where the staff are able to get information and ask questions in a Zoom meeting about vaccinations. Dr. Weiss said SMMC has a process in place for medical and religious exemptions and said they're being adjudicated at a different level.

Commissioner Gelder followed up asking Dr. Weiss if there is a potential outcome where the mandate could provide stress on the hospital system? Dr. Weiss said SMMC doesn't have impact information to present to the board today.

Commissioner Gelder asked Dr. Morrow if the Health District has plans to encourage the flu vaccine. He asked if the Health District has data on flu vaccination rates in any given season. Dr. Morrow replied that last October Kitsap administered 30 thousand flu shots in a month. He explained that typically, the flu shot is rolled out around September and is administered in November, December, and January. He said Kitsap did a good job getting the community vaccinated against influenza last year.

Commissioner Gelder said it would be helpful for the board to see data on this. In terms of direction Commissioner Gelder agencies should determine their vaccine requirements from staff individually, and said it is not a one size fits all situation.

Mayor Erickson agrees with Commissioner Gelder that each jurisdiction should determine their own mandates and noted she announced a mandate in for City of Poulsbo employees in May 2021. She said, in her agency, there are about four people who aren't vaccinated and said one has a medical exemption. Mayor Erickson stressed that mandates are important to keep the whole population safe. She asked Dr. Morrow if he has heard anything about updating Labor & Industries in light of talk of mandates from the federal level. Dr. Morrow replied that he has not heard any information on that.

Mayor Erickson asked, if vaccine mandates are passed at the federal and state levels, is the local level obligated to also pass mandates for their jurisdictions or is that redundant? Dr. Morrow replied said Washington State's implementation of OSHA rules means vaccines will be mandated at places with more than 100 employees. He noted this will take a while to evolve and implement and is subject to litigation or other delays.

Deputy Mayor Hytopoulos commented that the public health expertise is at the county level and mandates should not be jurisdiction by jurisdiction. She said this is a public health emergency and should be guided by public health expertise and not politics. She hopes that Dr. Morrow will make the decisions that will be appropriate. She said we need to balance the impacts on businesses and employees based on public health emergency policy. She said Kitsap is located

between three counties that require proof of vaccination for non-essential services and we need to move in that direction if Dr. Morrow feels like we should.

Mayor Rob Putaansuu said that he is concerned about mandate impacts on small businesses and work forces. He said COVID-19 is an issue, and he wishes that people would just get vaccinated. Mayor Putaansuu lost network connection and he was unable to finish his comments.

Mr. Grellner said that he really appreciated Deputy Mayor Hytopoulos comments. Dr. Morrow and Mr. Grellner have talked a lot about this. Mr. Grellner noted he is also the chair of the Washington State Board of Health. He said there is question regarding the interpretation of the law regarding the health officer and health board's interaction. He said he and Dr. Morrow feel the Health Officer should follow the direction of the board and should not operate independently of the board. The Health District would like for the board to help the Health Officer decide and work together to support that decision. The Health District does not want to operate independently.

Chair Garrido asked about a medical surge plan and how that would help our current situation and who would handle that. Dr. Morrow said the Health District and DEM have had an evolving medical surge plan for the pandemic. He said we have pushed against the blurred border of Crisis Standards of Care to the point where we are meeting and looking at activating our medical reserve corps to assist in setting up tents outside the hospital and staff a care facility. He stressed that these things are not normal or business as usual. It's a public health emergency. He noted the big issue is that there aren't people to staff these facilities. Dr. Morrow reiterated that the science speaks to the fact we need to get our community vaccinated.

Chair Garrido asked, how do we do that and put the information out? Mayor Erickson suggested that coercion isn't going to work, we need to put out information that refutes all of this misinformation in emails that we have received.

Mayor Erickson agrees with Commissioner Wolfe that putting the mandates on small businesses are going to make people more angry and more resentful. We still need to get our younger children vaccinated, and asked what do we do with our kids that can't get vaccinations? She stressed that the businesses aren't the enforcement mechanism that that would be inappropriate to force them into that situation. She stressed that there is a lot of misinformation out there and putting out information to refute the bad information needs to happen.

Chair Garrido suggested putting out a fact sheet or finding other ways to get information out. She suggested potentially doing forums where people can observe and have scientific information to help educate people. Chair Garrido would like to see the fact sheet together and ways to do outreach and touch base again.

Commissioner Gelder commented that he would agree that when it comes to small businesses that are struggling to recover, it's basically placing them into an enforcement role which isn't their role in our communities. If businesses choose to go that route, let them have their choice and they can market their business that way. This allows them to stand out and provides a level

of comfort. He asked where is there frequency of testing instead of vaccination? He stated that we have moved away from the testing component, ultimately our lives revolved around a testing regimen where we made sure there was adequate testing out there to identify the hot spots and tamp them out.

Mayor Putaansuu said he agrees with the sentiment around the small businesses, there aren't any easy answers but a mandate on the small businesses isn't a good option, he also stressed that we need to lead by example.

Mayor Greg Wheeler said that he still has concerns about the emergency department wait times with the first responders tied up waiting for patient drop off. He stated that there is a certain point where they need hard information when they are in triage. Mayor Wheeler asked if things continued this course and the hospital was not assisted by other groups, would the hospital be able to keep up? Mayor Wheeler doesn't object to mandates if it makes sense, and they know exactly what they are doing when they go that route. He stressed we should be careful and deliberate, but the goal is to get a healthy workforce that is safe and a public that feels safe going out into the community.

Commissioner Wolfe said there is confusion about public input for this meeting and wants to make sure that next week the materials and information for the board meeting are sent out with adequate time for the public to review.

Mr. Greller clarified that, for next week's meeting, as he understands it, the board may not be unified but at this point vaccine mandates are off the table. He said the Health District needs a clear direction on that today to move forward. As far as fact sheets, staff are willing to create more, however he noted that many members of the public are finding other websites and sources that they choose to believe and are informing their decisions. Mr. Grellner asked what the board's desire for the content of next week's meeting is.

Chair Garrido confirmed that this conversation needs to be continued. Commissioner Wolfe stated that he believes there should be no mandate as of today, but that doesn't mean not mean no mandate in the future.

Mayor Erickson said that people don't seem to understand the legal authority that is granted to this board and the Public Health Officer along with the history of how that came about. She would like the public to know the legal power of the board and Health Officer in Kitsap.

Dr. Morrow said he really appreciated the Chiefs Oliver and Gillard and Dr. Weiss attending and sharing insights. He said he appreciates all the board members for being so thoughtful and looking at all the complexities of this and figuring out where things go next.

There was no further comment.

ADJOURN

There was no further business; the meeting adjourned at 12:10 p.m.



Charlotte Garrido
Kitsap Public Health Board



Keith Grellner
Administrator

Board Members Present: *Mayor* Becky Erickson; *Commissioner* Charlotte Garrido; *Commissioner* Robert Gelder; *Deputy Mayor* Kirsten Hytopoulos, *Mayor* Robert Putaansuu; *Mayor* Greg Wheeler; *Commissioner* Ed Wolfe.

Board Members Absent: *None.*

Community Members Present: *See Attached*

Staff Present: Amy Anderson, *Public Health Educator, Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response*; Kandice Atismé-Bevins, *Program Manager, Case and Contact Investigation, COVID-19*; Angie Berger, *Administrative Assistant, Administration*; Stephanie Byrd, *Confidential Secretary, COVID-19*; Margo Chang, *COVID-19 Data Secretary Clerk 4, COVID-19*; April Fisk, *Program Coordinator, Contracts Manager, Public Records & Safety Officer, MAC, Administration*; Yolanda Fong, *Director, Community Health Division*; Keith Grellner, *Administrator, Administration*; Sarah Henley, *COVID Emergency Operations Coordinator, Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response*; Karen Holt, *Program Manager, Human Resources*; Kari Hunter, *Manager, Assessment and Epidemiology*; Renee Johnson, *Environmental Health Specialist, Pollution Identification & Correction*; Kimberly Jones, *Program Manager, Drinking Water and Onsite Sewage Systems*; Siri Kushner, *Assistant Director, Community Health Division*; Melissa Laird, *Manager, Accounting and Finance*; Nicole McNamara, *Community Liaison, Chronic Disease Prevention*; Alex Moore, *Environmental Health Specialist 1, Drinking Water and Onsite Sewage Systems*; Dr. Gib Morrow, *Health Officer, Administration*; Crystal Nuno, *Environmental Health Specialist 2-RS, Solid and Hazardous Waste*; Carin Onarheim, *Disease Intervention Specialist, Communicable Disease*; Debbie Rassa, *Public Health Nurse, Communicable Disease*; Stephanie Schreiber, *Community Liaison, Chronic Disease Prevention*; Kelsey Stedman, *Program Manager, Communicable Disease*; Layken Winchester; *Environmental Health Specialist, Food & Living Environment.*