

Moore County Board of Health  
June 7, 2021

Members Present: Leo Santowasso, PE, PLS, Chair  
Mark Brenner, MD  
Louis Gregory  
William Mang, PharmD  
Kamron Monroe, DDS  
Max Muse, RN, ME, Vice Chair  
Tony Price  
Benjamin Wacker, OD  
Robert R. Wittmann, MPH, Secretary to the Board

Members Absent: Janice Baker, DVM, MS, DACVPM; Betty J. Goodridge, MHA, CMA; Paul Kuzma, MD

**Call to Order and Introductions:**

The meeting of the Board of Health was held in the Board Room of the Moore County Health Department in Carthage, NC. Chair Leo Santowasso called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. Health Department staff present were: Teresa Forrest, Administrative Officer; Melissa Fraley, Nursing Director; Matt Garner, Health Educator; Miriam King, Health Educator; and Jennifer Wallace, Administrative Officer. Ward Medlin, Deputy County Attorney, was present for the meeting. Sammy Choi, Director of the Department of Research at Womack Army Medical Center, was present via video conferencing.

**Invocation:** Robert Wittmann gave the invocation.

**Secretary to the Board:** Robert Wittmann read the following statement: *Does any Board Member have a conflict of interest concerning agenda items the Board will address in this meeting?* None were noted.

**Approval of, and/or Adjustments to, Agenda:** Kamron Monroe made a motion to accept the agenda as presented, seconded by Tony Price. All were in favor and the motion carried.

**Public Comments:**

No one signed up for public comments.

**Presentations:** Projected level of COVID Immunity: Y. Sammy Choi, MD, Chief, Department of Research, Womack Army Medical Center, Fort Bragg, NC

Sammy Choi presented a summary of the projected immunity to COVID-19 for the seven-county area surrounding Fort Bragg, with a focus on Moore County. It was noted that Moore County had the highest vaccination rate in the region. The predictive models used to project the immunity rates were explained. Data used included information on the eleven hospitals in the

region (hospital bed occupancy and ventilator use), county population density and the number of COVID-19 cases. Sampling, measuring antibody levels, was done on a 82<sup>nd</sup> Brigade group to validate the model predictions. The number of fully vaccinated individuals in Moore County, as of 3 June, is 42.7%. However, including natural immunity from having the disease and recovering, for Moore County, the model predicts 58.5% full immunity for the population (all ages), which Sammy Choi stated was quite good. He noted that vaccination rate is related to per capita income and to education level. For herd immunity, the County would need approximately 80%. Sammy Choi stated that, if 10% more people were vaccinated, that situation would be great. No one else in the region is close to Moore County in vaccination rates. He noted that some vaccinations for military personnel who are Moore County residents have not been counted. Those figures are not shared by Fort Bragg. Sammy Choi stated that natural long-term immunity from getting the disease and recovering looks good eight months out. However, vaccine immunity is better than wild-type immunity. He noted that Moore County is experiencing the same thing that everyone in the nation is – there are vaccine holdouts, even in the medical/health area. Tony Price stated that perhaps we are not reaching those people with lower education and financial means. Robert Wittmann asked about ways to reach those who are decidedly against the vaccine. Sammy Choi stated that mythbuster-type videos have been successful but some people just can't be reached. Robert Wittmann asked for a copy of the mythbuster presentation to share with his regional health director group. Sammy Choi stated that the data shows that the poorer and the less educated you are the less likely you will take the COVID-19 vaccine, the same as with any other vaccine. Louis Gregory asked why that was the case. Sammy Choi stated that would be a discussion for an epidemiologist or a social scientist but that it could be related to race, ethnicity, a general mistrust of the establishment, and/or conspiracy theories. Discussion followed. Suggested outreach areas included Cameron, Eagle Springs, and Robbins. Robert Wittmann noted that the Department will continue to work with ministers, family doctors and community leaders. It was suggested to get support from coaches, team captains, 4H, and Scout groups. Matt Garner stated that the latest data tool from NC Department of Health and Human Services shows local areas, by zip code, of social vulnerability. This tool will be helpful in planning future vaccination events.

### **Board of Health Education/Staff Reports:**

#### **Board of Health Committee Reports:**

**1.) Communications Committee Report** - Tony Price gave the Committee report. He stated that, since the Health Department was not allowed to use COVID-19 grant funds to purchase a mobile unit for vaccination outreach, he had reached out to Senator Tom McInnis about options for funding. Leo Santowasso asked if the County had funds for the purchase. Louis Gregory stated that the County has EMS (Emergency Medical Services) equipment and staff at our disposal. He stated that the Health Department could coordinate with EMS staff to administer the vaccine. He stated that the request should be brought to the attention of the Board of Commissioners. Leo Santowasso stated that he would talk to Wayne Vest, County Manager, to get the item on the agenda of a Board of Commissioners meeting. Louis Gregory stated that the County also has fire trucks available so there is no need to go out and get more equipment.

Robert Wittmann asked for Board of Health support to continue advertising COVID-19 vaccinations on local billboards. Mark Brenner asked if there was a way to monitor how effective the billboards are, in regards to their cost. Robert Wittmann stated that he could talk to the company but there was not a way to get a baseline. Mark Brenner said that we could ask for feedback on the Internet, asking where people heard about the vaccinations. In addition, he asked if the billboards could be placed in geographically compromised places. Robert Wittmann stated that the Department was using billboards where they were placed in the County and where the advertising is available. He stated that the Department is also getting more posters to get out to places like the Department of Social Services, restaurants, barber shops and beauty shops, laundromats, etc. Max Muse suggested that posters could also be placed in grocery stores, post offices and liquor stores.

**2.) Vaccine Committee Report** – Bill Mang stated that there was no report at this time. He said that he was glad to hear the discussion about reaching out to areas with the EMS vehicles and fire trucks. He will take that information back to the Vaccine Committee for discussion.

**3.) COVID Committee Report** – Max Muse stated no report, maintain status quo. Mark Brenner stated that we can't rest now, since there are new variants to the virus. Robert Wittmann noted that, currently, the vaccines available are effective with known variants.

**Nursing Director's Report:** Melissa Fraley stated that the Health Department had begun vaccinating jail inmates for Hepatitis A. There was a good number of people opting to take the vaccine and a few wanted the COVID-19 vaccine. The Department will continue with the vaccinations in the jail every other week. Staff are also reaching out to the Pinehurst Treatment Center to offer the Hepatitis A vaccine and possibly the COVID-19 vaccine. Robert Wittmann noted that, during the pandemic, regular communicable diseases have been, and continue to be, addressed.

**COVID-19 Update:** Matt Garner updated the Board on the current data for COVID-19 in the County. Robert Wittmann noted that this information is sent to the Clerk to the Board of Commissioners to share with them. Matt Garner noted that there were four straight weeks of declining cases and there are currently no outbreaks in a long-term care facility. He showed the Board a video from Sharon Harrell, DDS that promoted vaccination. He reviewed a model that showed vaccination rates in different areas of the County, which can be used to plan for outreach events. Max Muse stated that he had seen data about a high percentage of nursing home staff who refused the COVID-19 vaccination and asked about verification. Robert Wittmann noted that Regional Prevention Surveillance Team leader Tamiko Gland had submitted a report with that information (emailed to the Board for this meeting discussion). The data showed that some long-term care staff vaccination rates were as low as 25% and as high as 100%.

**Health Director's Report:** Robert Wittmann presented statistics for April and May deaths, noting how small the number of COVID-19 related deaths were. He asked for Board of Health support for the Health Department requesting a security camera system for the building. He

noted that, during the pandemic, staff were required to work nights and weekends. Even when staff leave at normal hours in winter, it is dark. Some employees had recently expressed concerns that they felt insecure when leaving the building. We would like to put up exterior cameras to feed into our security system. Leo Santowasso asked about the cost. Robert Wittmann stated that the exact cost is not known without bids but the price might be as much as \$16,000. Robert Wittmann stated that it would be a good investment for staff security and morale. Louis Gregory asked if this item was included in the fiscal year 2022 budget. Robert Wittmann stated that it had just been brought to his attention, after the proposed budget was submitted. There were recent events in the parking lot that looked physical. Robert Wittmann asked if it would be too late to ask for this in the 2022 budget. Louis Gregory stated that it was not too late, as the budget had not yet been approved by the Board of Commissioners. Bill Mang suggested putting in police call boxes in the parking lot. Louis Gregory stated that Robert Wittmann should speak to Wayne Vest, the following day, with a proposal that includes a 'not-to-exceed' figure. Louis Gregory stated that Robert Wittmann should suggest video camera system consideration and ask for feedback before the budget is finalized. The fiscal year 2022 budget is still being discussed by the Board of Commissioners. Robert Wittmann asked for a motion from the Board to support this discussion with County management about not only consideration of a system-wide security system but also support from the Board of Health specifically for the Health Department. Louis Gregory stated that there were a lot of things to talk about now that the issue has been brought to his attention. Mark Brenner made a motion to support a facility-wide security evaluation of a security plan, hallmarked by video surveillance. Max Muse seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion carried.

Robert Wittmann asked for a Board consensus to continue funding vaccination advertising on the billboards, utilizing existing COVID-19 funding. He noted that there was a considerable amount of COVID-19 grant funding available, over \$800,000, but that the spending restrictions were quite severe. The Department has already accomplished the requirements called for in the grant and there are few allowable expenses. Louis Gregory asked what activities the grant funds would cover. Jennifer Wallace stated that COVID-19 testing, surveillance and vaccination expenses were allowed for use of the funds. Robert Wittmann stated that, if the grant funds cannot be used, then the funding will go back to Washington. Louis Gregory asked that the Department look at options to use the remainder of the money that was already approved and let him know. Robert Wittmann stated that using the funding with the restrictions is difficult for all counties. The topic is a standing agenda item at local health director meetings, both State-wide and regional. Mark Brenner asked if there were any consulting jobs that could help the Department navigate the surplus and spend the money legally. Robert Wittmann stated that the State and the County have attorneys to review funding requests. The Department can make requests to Raleigh for a purchase and the State can either approve it or not. Louis Gregory stated that the Department could use consultants or any other reason to utilize the funding to keep Moore County taxpayers from having to pay anything. He asked that the Department come up with a list of those things that we could still use the money for. He also stated that the County could provide help with this assignment.

Robert Wittmann noted that NC Department of Health and Human Services has planned major changes to be in place by July 1<sup>st</sup>. First, they are hiring a Health Equity Officer. Susan Perry will serve as Chief Deputy Secretary for Opportunity and Well-Being. A new division of Child and Family Well-Being will be created. An Office of Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery is being created. Finally, Dr Cardra Burns will be the new Deputy Secretary for Operational Excellence and Tracy Zimmerman will be the new Deputy Secretary for Policy, Strategy and External Engagement.

Robert Wittmann stated that Paul Kuzma had requested to modify Board of Health attendance requirements to allow members to participate remotely. During the pandemic, accommodations were made for remote attendance but usual requirements for the Board are to meet in person. Robert Wittmann stated that he had spoken briefly with Misty Randall, County Attorney. He noted that in-person meetings allowed the public the opportunity to petition the Board in person. He asked the Board chair how he wanted to address the request. Tony Price proposed that the Communication Committee discuss the proposal and study it before bringing their findings back to the full Board. He stated that the Committee would discuss this with Misty Randall and Ward Medlin to see how much flexibility is allowed. Ward Medlin noted that, if Board members were allowed to remotely participate, then the public would have to be notified and allowed to participate remotely as well. To allow digital access, we have to notify the public and tell them how they can participate that way as well. Ward Medlin stated that he needed to know what the Board would like to do and then he could research it and see what the Board can do. Tony Price asked Leo Santowasso if he wanted the Communications Committee to handle this and he agreed.

**Approval of Consent Agenda:** Consent agenda contained the minutes for the May 3, 2021 meeting. Tony Price made a motion to approve the minutes. Kamron Monroe seconded the motion. All were in favor and the motion carried.

**Old Business:** There was no old business.

**New Business:** Health Department Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Update – Robert Wittmann stated that the budget submitted to the County Manager for proposal to the Board of Commissioners would keep in place the current operating budget and staff. Adjustments will be proposed in areas that the Department does not control, such as IT, property management, etc. The budget as proposed would be sufficient for us to operate for next year. The only unknown we have is regarding Medicaid revenues for next fiscal year as we transition from a fee-for-service system to a per capita one. We will learn as we go and then we can project the next year's fiscal revenues with more confidence. For the 2022 fiscal year, the Department used current budgeted revenues.

Leo Santowasso noted that the next Board of Health meeting date is on July 12, 2021.

**Adjourn:** Max Muse made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Mark Brenner. All were in favor and the motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 8:15 pm.