

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
November 16, 2021

Present: Legislators Andrea Moroughan, Richard Chartrand, Phil Hathway, and Lisa Virkler. Legislator Kulzer was excused.

Others: Legislators Larry Dolhof, Tom Osborne, Jerry King, Ron Burns, and Ian Gilbert; County Manager Ryan Piche; County Atty. Joan McNichol; Treasurer Eric Virkler; Human Resource Director Caitlyn Smith; and Information Technology Director Conner Biolsi.

Committee Chair Legislator Moroughan called the meeting at 2:17 p.m.

Legislator Virkler made a motion to accept the minutes from October 19, 2021 as recorded, seconded by Legislator Chartrand and carried.

Covid-19 update – Anna Platz, Public Health Deputy Director

Anna Platz reported that there are currently 140 active cases; 16 hospitalizations; the 7-day positivity rate average is 9.4% and the 14-day positivity rate average is 9.3% which continues to put Lewis County in a high transmission rate. To no longer be considered a high transmission area the positivity rate would have to be 5% or less. Over the past month the active cases have plateaued.

For October, 79% of cases were unvaccinated individuals, with 68% of all hospitalizations being unvaccinated individuals. To date for November, 73% of cases were unvaccinated, with 82% of all hospitalizations being unvaccinated individuals. Legislator Chartrand asked about reinfections, Anna responded that she didn't have exact figures, but it is really low. The statistics show overwhelmingly that cases and hospitalizations are unvaccinated individuals. Legislator Virkler pointed out that our positivity rate is 9.4% and New York City is 1%.

As of October 31st, there are 13,088 residents who have at least one dose of the vaccine or 49% of our population. The 18 year and older make up 64% of that figure. There is 46% of our population who are fully vaccinated. All three manufacturers, Pfizer, Moderna, and J&J all recommend booster doses. There have been 8 booster clinics so far, this Friday from 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. there will be one at the Croghan Fire Hall. On December 3rd, there will be a booster clinic at the Constableville Fire Hall.

Children, five to eleven, are eligible for the vaccine and Public Health is already working with schools to set up clinics. Copenhagen Central School is this afternoon, Harrisville Central School is on Wednesday, Beaver River Central School on Thursday, South Lewis is the following Monday, and Lowville Academy Central School is on Tuesday. There have been 3,548 total cases since the beginning of the pandemic. At the height of the pandemic the county had 254 active cases.

The following dockets were reviewed:

1. Authorizing Community Services Director to Submit Application/Funding Proposal to NYS Office of Mental Health for Systems of Care Grant in the amount of \$25,000.00.

AYE 4 NAY 0

2. Appointing Howard Meny, MD to the Lewis County General Hospital Board of Managers for a term of January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2026.

AYE 4 NAY 0

3. Appointing Mary Ellen McManus, Jennifer Jones, and Linda P. Hirschey to the Office For the Aging Advisory Council for a term of January 1, 2022 through December 31, 2024.

AYE 4 NAY 0

4. Amending Direct Foster Care Parent Contracts with OCFS Mandatory 1% Rate Increase Retroactive to April 1, 2021 and to authorize inclusion of provisions for any future payment increases or adjustments mandated by OCFS.

AYE 4 NAY 0

5. Authorizing Renewal Agreements between Lewis County Department of Social Services and Various Providers for Program and Operating Services.

AYE 4 NAY 0

6. Appropriating Funds for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in the amount of \$100,879.46.

AYE 4 NAY 0

7. Appointing Student Representatives, Gavin Tufo, Brett Vogt, Aaron Parow, and Hailey Meagher to the Lewis County Youth Advisory Board.

AYE 4 NAY 0

Motions:

1. Legislator Virkler made a motion to authorize Social Services Commissioner, Jennifer Jones to refill one (1) full-time Program Examiner position effective immediately due to resignation, seconded by Legislator Hathway and carried.

Legislator Virkler recalled a decision that was made a while back to cover the cost of making videos supporting Mental Health Awareness and is looking for volunteers to come forward that would be willing to share their stories. Legislator Moroughan voiced her opinion that it is a tough subject to talk about because of the stigma that is unfortunately attached to mental illness. County Manager Ryan Piche stated that the county needs to work harder on being able to destigmatize mental illness and talk more openly about it, so people know it is acceptable to seek help. The concept is to interview 5 people, three of them who are living with mental health issues and maybe two others who provide services.

Ryan went on to state that one third of all county employees are dealing with mental health issues either through self-reporting or medication, so it is clearly prevalent. Community Services Director, Patricia Fralick pointed out that it is also really affecting young people in the community who have suicidal ideologies. Legislator Moroughan and Legislator Osborne agreed that this is an important topic to tackle. They are looking to do the filming in December, so anyone interested should reach out to Patricia Fralick at Lewis County Community Services.

Lewis County Health Systems CEO, Jerry Cayer reported that the hospital will prepare to exit the Harrisville Health Center over the next 6 weeks. The provider will still continue to see patients in that 6-week period and then eventually transition out of that building and remove the equipment. There will be communication to each patient that Dr. Shambo will still be able to see them and will be relocating closer to Lowville than Harrisville. Over the last few days of the lease the furniture, equipment and supplies will be removed from the building.

There is a process that needs to be handled through the Department of Health to go through a closure plan. The article in the paper outlines that since the spring of 2019 the Town had planned to work the hospital out of the Harrisville Health Center. The Hospital's Executive Team had a productive discussion on this Monday evening. Mr. Cayer is profoundly disappointed in the Town's decision to move in this direction as the vision and the mission of the Lewis County Health System is to work with the entire county.

Legislator Hathway questioned if the team from the Harrisville Health Center would remain together at the new stand-alone location, Mr. Cayer responded that the plan is to have them at an existing location but together as one team. Legislator Virkler spoke up that right now with the shortage of staffing in Emergency Departments, a Primary Health Care Provider becomes so much more vital and Dr. Shambo is one of the best. Mr. Cayer felt that if the people of Harrisville feel strongly about continuing this service, then they should let their voices be heard. Legislator Hathway didn't want to comment on the situation.

Mr. Cayer handed out an informational packet pertaining to the religious exemption. The next steps for the 20 individuals who applied for and were granted a religious exemption will have until November 22, 2021 to receive their first dose of the covid-19 vaccine or submit a valid medical exemption. The information states that the health system should have a process in place to consider reasonable accommodation requests from covered personnel based on sincerely held religious beliefs. The hospital's Corporate Compliance Attorney Hoffman and their Human Resources Attorney Schaffer have reviewed the information given by the state extensively.

The majority of the religious exemptions are clinical workers which is problematic. They are mostly Registered Nurses who work on the acute side. The Emergency Department has been on Diversion since Sunday late afternoon and continues to be. The beds are full, over 50% of the census is positive, and the hospital is struggling to have adequate staffing. They are having to have staff work extra hours. Out of the 20 individuals, 7 of them are in the nursing service. The hospital doesn't want to pause anymore services. This is not just a local issue; it has become a state and national issue.

Legislator Virkler questioned whether reasonable accommodations could be made, Mr. Cayer stated that unfortunately due to the fact that 17 out of the 20 individuals are "front facing" which means they are in direct contact with patients and there are no accommodations that could be made to allow them to continue to be "front facing". There is very little work that can be done off campus.

County Manager, Ryan Piche reported that there are some counties throughout the state that are preparing for the OSHA regulation, that will require employers of more than 100 employees to require either vaccination or test policy in place, to be adopted by PESH which

governs counties. Ryan recommended not doing anything yet and just wait for more guidance from New York State. Legislator Chartrand was not very optimistic that the state will issue any clear guidance on this subject.

There being no other business to come before the committee, Legislator Virkler made a motion to adjourn at 3:00 p.m., seconded by Legislator Chartrand and carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Cassandra Moser, Clerk of the Board