

Connecticut Commission on Health Equity Executive Committee

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Attendance: Colleen Gallagher , Elizabeth Kraus, Kristen Noelle Hatcher, Sharon Mierzwa , Eva Nepal (Department of Public Health in lieu of Dr. Margaret Heinz), Raja Staggers-Hakim , Glenn Cassis, Sylvia-Gafford-Alexander, Brad Plebani, Christine Palm, Arvind Shaw, Cathy Graves, Marie Spivey, Merinda Brown, Jim Gatlin; Stephanie Knutson (Department of Education)

Call-in: Catherine Medina (Hispanic Health Council and Uconn. School of Social Work), Stephanie Paulmeno (General Public), Greg Stanton

Not Attending: Werner Oyanadel

1. Welcome and Introduction. Commissioner Marie Spivey welcomed the members of the commission and visitors to the meeting. All persons were asked to introduce themselves and state the organizations with which they were affiliated. Commissioner Marie Spivey relayed to the members that there was an executive committee meeting held prior to the current meeting. Members were informed that the meeting discussed the committees which are currently functioning. Members were informed of a proposed planning meeting which would be held in February, in order to discuss the infrastructure of the commission and how each of the committees are functioning as well as looking whether the commission is accomplishing what it has set out to do. Commissioner Marie Spivey went on to focus on two very critical points. The first being a reminder of the duties of the commission as outlined in the Bylaws. Commissioner Marie Spivey also reiterated the fact that it was important to remind members of the duties of the commission and the activities which the commission carried out in the last year (2012). Commissioner Spivey indicated that the activities were not evaluated in terms of their pertinence to the commission's duties. Commissioner Marie Spivey thanked everyone for the great work which was done last year.

2. Reports by Committees

Policy Committee: Commissioner Catherine Medina reported that the policy committee was collaborating with the multi-cultural partnership in looking at an assessment regarding the health equity plan. Dr. Stagers-Hakim added that Tamara Petro who is the Executive Director of the multi-cultural leadership institute would offer a brief overview of the process. The multi-cultural leadership institute was asserted as being the sub-contractor with DMHAS funded in order to assist the commission on this project. They therefore work with consultants who go out to respective agencies. Commissioner Catherine Medina then stated that the policy committee would be able to evaluate some efforts being made by state agencies with respect to how they are moving along with health equity plans. A call was also made for new members to join the policy committee and members were encouraged to contact either Commissioner Catherine Medina herself or Dr. Raja Stagers-Hakim with regards to joining the committee. Dr. Raja Stagers-Hakim noted that they had met with Lieutenant Governor Nancy Wyman in November 2012 in order to gain the support of the Governor's cabinet with regards to the health equity policy initiative with state agencies and she was very supportive of this effort. She also informed them that she would mention it to other commissioners in their cluster group meetings. Commissioner Marie Spivey confirmed this and went on to state that Lt. Governor Nancy Wyman's interests and the Governors interests are to see if the state agencies are being effective with funds provided to the communities that they serve and whether the costs are appropriate. Brad Plebani added that the meeting with Lt. Governor Nancy Wyman was requested in response to comments made by various individuals at state agencies who had attended the various meetings which the commission has hosted around the issue of developing health equity plans. They expressed a desire to know the Governor and Lt. Governor were behind this effort, because they recognized that it would require shifting the culture of their agencies in some measure.

Legislative Committee: Dr. Raja Stagers-Hakim offered a brief overview of the committee on behalf of Commissioner Werner Oyanadel. Members were asked to refer to the minutes from the last meeting which discussed the RBA Turn the Curve Session. The last session was in December 2012 and it was on Asthma. The committee worked closely with DPH and it was also a collaborative effort between the legislative committee and the data committee. Margaret Hynes was cited as being very instrumental in getting epidemiologists to give presentations. It was further noted that the session was very well attended. Dr. Raja Stagers-Hakim noted that a report was still to be generated as well as some action steps following this session. She went on to announce that members for the legislative committee were needed and requested that persons in attendance could feel free to voice their interests. Dr. Raja Stagers-Hakim also informed the members that she would be working with student interns with regards to reviewing legislation that is being proposed. Further, Dr. Stagers mentioned that the legislative committee had identified certain key legislative priorities for the current legislative session. An example would be funding for linguistic services in medical settings and also, as a result of the public forums, Medicaid spend-downs. Medical spend-downs were asserted as being a recurrent theme at the public forums. A second important activity identified by the committee would be to have a breakfast or press release for the legislative session. The notion of

a press-event at this point was identified as being most probable. The committee was noted as still having to figure out the details of such an event as decisions would have to be made in terms of who would be invited as a guest speaker and who would be invited to support this effort. Commissioner Brad Plebani posed a question with respect to an amendment by the legislation of its Connecticut statute which deals with medical interpretive services. The amendment requires the commission on social services to establish a code for billing presumably under the Medicaid programme and to implement that code by July 1st, 2013. Clarity was sought as to whether members knew of this statute and the commission was encouraged to follow this statute to ensure that it is implemented both broadly and well. The legislative committee in particular was encouraged to monitor the progress of this amendment. Commissioner Sylvia Gafford-Alexander and another member in attendance offered to follow up on this bill. Commissioner Marie Spivey asked that follow-up be done and that feed-back be offered in this regard during the next scheduled meeting.

Data Committee: Commissioner Sharon Mierzwa offered an update on the data committee's work. It was noted that the Data committee collaborated with the Latino and Puerto-Rican American Affairs Commission, the CHE Legislative Committee, and the Asthma Programme at DPH in hosting a Turn the Curve session. It was deemed important to note that there were Asthma community members who participated from a local school's health perspective. With regards to feed-back, it was stated that there were reports that would be generated from participants and the moderator and once the planning committee had reviewed those reports, they would then be shared with the rest of the commission members. The data committee members were said to consist of: Sharon Mierzwa, Margaret Hynes, Greg Stanton, and Elizabeth Krause and there are also non-commission members who participate including, Eva Nepal, Russell Melmed and Moira Lawson.

Resource Development Committee: Commissioner Sylvia Gafford-Alexander noted that the Resource Development Committee had been working closely with Commissioner Glenn Cassis. The report was therefore deferred to Commissioner Glenn Cassis in order to offer an update on the work being done.

Public Voice Committee: Commissioner Glenn Cassis stated that the last meeting that the committee held was in November 2012. More recent conference call-in meetings had been held in which public forums were discussed, in particular a public forum scheduled for December in Torrington, which had to be re-scheduled due to certain challenges. A forum was held at New Opportunities on January 9th, which was hosted by Dr. Jim Gatling and was well received. It was reported that the issue of spend downs once again featured very prominently with respect to it being a major concern. Challenges faced by community members with respect to connecting with legislators with regards to their issues in terms of health and equity. The matter of isolation in the Torrington area was another problem expressed, as a lot of individuals had challenges going to their health care providers. Commissioner Glenn Cassis informed members that a report would be prepared as well as an outline of prospective steps which could be taken in addressing the concerns voiced at these public forums. Commissioner Glenn Cassis further stated that he along with Commissioner Sylvia Gafford-Alexander and Dr. Raja Staggers-Hakim had been doing some outreach work to organizations and possible funders to get support for activities which the committee will be engaging. One of these activities includes a

women's health retreat which will be held in the spring. A second event is health Sabbath day. Members were informed that letters had been sent out to some foundations and organizations together with phone-calls. This was done in a bid to solidify some collaboration and hopefully some funding from various entities. A minority mental health awareness day was held in East Hartford on December 1st and Commissioner Glenn Cassis, thanked all the members who came to support that effort. The event was hosted by a grass roots group which aims to address mental health problems amongst minorities and several members of this group were asked to be part of the work being done within the public voice committee.

Dr. Raja Staggers-Hakim added that the committee held the public forum in Torrington in response to a public forum held there in spring 2012 and the session in particular was unique. A follow-up session was then arranged in order to delve deeper into the issues identified through the first session. Individuals in attendance brought it to the attention of the commission representatives that there were work groups set up throughout the area to address the issues raised. There was an offer made that some of these work groups would be able to offer a report back to the commission with regards to their progress in addressing the challenges relating to health. Commissioner Sharon Mierzwa added that Torrington was part of the Lichfield county community transformation grant process which identifies coalition building and changes in policies and practices to eliminate health disparities. Therefore if service providers are facing some regulatory challenges which impact access to health care or quality of healthcare, it was hoped that they were connected to the coalition and other CTG members. It was asserted that that would serve as a good vehicle for them.

Commissioner Arvind Shaw made the assertion that medical spend downs appeared to be a critical issue that had to be addressed. Commissioner Sylvia Gafford-Alexander stated that Middlesex hospital had done a pilot study with regards to the most expensive users of their services and have identified substance abuse and mental health, whilst focusing in on a more case-management driven system to reduce cost.

Commissioner Arvind Shaw was requested to define spend down for the record. He asserted that when individuals qualify for Medicaid, their assets are looked at and if they are viewed as having assets which exceed a certain amount, they are required to go on a spend down of their assets or incur some expenses. It was argued as being comparable on some level to a major deductible. Once the spend down is achieved they are able to access those services and medications. Commissioner Arvind Shaw then clarified that it is a policy which he suspects is driving up utilization. This is due to the fact that it is being increasingly observed that utilization of services is going up, especially the inappropriate kind of utilization which has been said to cost approximately \$1.1 Billion.

Commissioner Colleen Gallagher offered the suggestion that a discussion be entered into with the policy makers at DSF in order to determine what percentage of people this affects. Commissioner Marie Spivey stated that the commission would try to get that relevant data, if it is being calculated.

Communications Committee: Commissioner Christine Palm informed members that a Communications Committee is being formed. She argued that there was not enough consciousness with respect to the good work being carried out by the commission and that the profile of the commission had to be increased in the eyes of the public as well

as the media. Two specific approaches to increase this profile were outlined by Christine Palm. An institutional image campaign, which would include logos, letterheads, brochures and the website were proposed as aiding in getting the commission's public image pieces in sync. The second part would be for the commission to have a stronger media presence, which would include more quotations within the print media from members of the commission commenting on legislation or other relevant issues. The suggestion was also made by Christine Palm that a short survey would be circulated during the meeting to gauge whether members would be interested in serving as representatives/spokespersons for the commission and willing to include questions relating to the geographical location and topical area of interest. Commissioner Marie Spivey encouraged members to participate in this new committee.

Youth Committee: Commissioner Kristen Noelle Hatcher informed members that several people have been approached to participate in an inaugural meeting. The discussion at the meeting would center on the priorities of this newly formed committee. A Meet-O-Matic would also be sent to all members to gauge interest in attending the meeting. Commission members were however also encouraged to offer any input they may have with regards to the priorities of the youth committee by either calling in or attending the meeting.

3. Presentation: Tamara Petro of the Multi-cultural leadership institute (MLI) was introduced by Dr. Raja Staggers-Hakim. She offered an update in terms of the progress made with regards to the policy committee's initiative to work with state agencies with respect to their health equity plans. Tamara Petro offered a brief history of the agency which was established in 1995. MLI is a private non-profit which has as one of its primary focus areas, health disparities in mental health. The MLI works state-wide and is being funded by DMHAS with regards to their work in mental health disparities. A team of five consultants were gathered to aid in the work the commission was doing with regards to health equity plans in different state agencies. MLI has subcontracted five individuals with varying expertise in the area of health equity. The consultants were matched with a variety of state agencies. The scope of work was to review the existing documents outlining health policies, following that an assessment guideline or document was created in October 2012, which enabled the state agencies to use the document in order to synthesize it into an assessment guideline and come up with an actual plan draft. The consultants were asked to assist the agencies with those assessments and help the state agencies write their actual plans. The current work being done concerns working on draft sample plans for agencies. These agencies had been requesting for sample plans to be furnished as there was a sense that the agencies were trying to navigate their way around uncharted territory. Tamara Petro made the assertion that even though national and state models have been looked at to inform this process, it still remains challenging.

Most state agencies were said to be responsive with regards to the work they have been doing with the consultants, whereas some agencies have not been as responsive due to varying reasons. A sense of optimism was however reported as gaining momentum as the consultants have offered positive feedback. Tamara Petro also shared the fact that there was a tight time-line with regards to the work that had to be done. In addition to the technical assistance work of actually drafting the plans, a series of webinars have been organized for the end of January, end of February and

the end of March. These webinars would cover topics related to social indicators of health, cultural competency, staffing and data and evaluation. It was noted that there were some challenges being faced with agencies being unable to connect the work that they are doing with certain social indicators of health and other key areas. The webinars were hence viewed as a way to address this challenge. Commissioner Marie Spivey posed a question with regards to the number of people who they expect would be attending these webinars as well as the expectation they may possibly have for the webinars. Tamara Petro asserted that the webinar would be open to departments and that they would be able to facilitate 100 people in the webinar. The point was also made that some of the agencies are forming work groups and this is aiding in the distribution of the work that has to be done. The timing for the final report was noted as being April, 2012 as the funding cycle ends in June 2012. Funding for the implementation of the plans was acknowledged as being something that will have to be looked at but the current work being done was recognized as being an important step towards eventual implementation. It was further asserted that the consultants would offer technical assistance in terms of guidelines for the implementation of the plans.

4. Treasurer's Report: Commissioner Arvind Shaw informed members that there would be a report presented in the next meeting and that he was hoping to confirm by next meeting that the commission would have an excess of at least \$20,000.

5. Executive Directors Report: Dr. Raja Staggers-Hakim noted that with regards to the health equity analyst position on the commission was approved and the job description was written and approved. It ended up in OPM and they have promised to expedite the process. Commissioner Marie Spivey asserted that the process of interviewing and hiring the executive committee/personnel committee would have to be looked at as well.

6. Elections: The nominations committee convened the election process. The nominations committee consisted of Elizabeth Krause, Stephanie Paulmeno and Greg Stanton and was staffed by Dr. Raja Staggers-Hakim. The nominations committees decided to follow the precedence that has been set in the past with regards to the process, which is different to that outlined in the Bylaws. The members were however informed by Commissioner Elizabeth Krause that the Bylaws would be modified in order to reflect the current election process. Candidates were given the opportunity to offer brief vision statements. The paper ballots and electronic ballots were then to be tallied by Commissioner Elizabeth Krause and Dr. Raja Staggers-Hakim after the meeting. The results were going to be communicated to members either on January, 15th 2013 or soon thereafter.

7. Meeting is adjourned.