

The Fayette County Board of Health met on Tuesday, March 14, 2006, in the Public Meeting Room of the Fayette County Administrative Complex, 140 Stonewall Avenue, Fayetteville, Georgia.

Board of Health Members Present:

John DeCotis, PhD
Thomas Faulkner, MD
Lynette Peterson
Lyn Redwood, RN, MSN
Judi-ann Rutherford
Michael Strain, MD

Staff Members Present:

Margaret Berry
Carolyn Callison
Merle Crowe
Rick Fehr
Rodney Hilley
Carl Knapp
Peggy Monkus
Wendia Wortham
Dennis Davenport, Attorney

CALL TO ORDER: Dr. Strain called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM November 8, 2005: Motion to approve the minutes as written was made by Ms. Rutherford, seconded by Ms. Peterson. There was no discussion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

OLD/UNFINISHED BUSINESS / PUBLIC COMMENT:

Election of Officers: Motion was made by Ms. Redwood to re-elect Dr. Strain as Chair, seconded by Ms. Rutherford. The motion carried unanimously. Motion was made by Ms. Peterson to re-elect Ms. Redwood as Vice Chair, seconded by Ms. Rutherford. The motion was approved unanimously. There was no discussion.

Developmental Disabilities Task Force Update: Ms. Janet Smola, Chair of the Developmental Disabilities Task Force (DDTF), updated the board on current progress of the DDTF. Further information will be presented at the May meeting. DDTF got 1500 Medicaid waiver slots reintroduced for the overall state, and over the weekend 2 senators suggested increasing that count to 3000, which would mean getting nearly half the 6,800 people in Georgia off waiting lists. There are about 130 on the waiting list in Fayette County. The board was encouraged to support this measure to any contact they might have in state government. It is a budget line item in a bill and Ms. Smola will email the bill number to the board members.

Mr. Gordon Furr: Mr. Furr stated that he had installed septic systems in Fayette and other counties for many years. He expressed concern for septic disposal in the county and wondered if Environmental Health inspectors were counting the number of bedrooms in new homes. Mr. Fehr said they were. Dr. Strain thanked Mr. Fehr and Mr. Furr for their work on this issue. There was no other Public Comment.

PRESENTATION OF BUDGET: Ms. Crowe presented the Fiscal Year 2007 Budget using a PowerPoint presentation that showed current conditions in Fayette County, and changes from 1999 to 2005. Overall population is projected to triple 1980–2010, from 29,043 to 121,600. The number of Fayette County employees increased by 63% to maintain government services. Physical Health saw many changes due to the increase in population. Hispanic patient visits increased by 227% (875—2869) and communication with these patients is very difficult due to their inability to speak or understand English and low education levels; office visits are more complicated and require translation services for those reasons. There have been increases in schools and daycare facilities, with audits going up from 62 to 112. State law requires schools and daycare facilities immunization records be audited by a nurse, and the increased number of facilities takes far more time. Follow up visits are often necessary, and other support was given to schools and daycare facilities as well—meaning much staff time is spent in this effort. Several programs have been recently expanded in addition to the increased of numbers of school audits: Babies Born Healthy, Children's 1st, High-risk Infant Follow-up, and other case management programs have expanded services. Responsibilities have also been added: Emergency Preparedness, which requires Fayette County Health Department directors to be on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year; HIPAA requirements must be followed; GRITS (Georgia statewide immunization database) must be uploaded daily; Non-Georgia Better Health Care Follow-up; translation services for the expanded number of Hispanic clients; Universal Newborn Hearing Screening and Childcare Health Screenings.

Great difficulty has been experienced in filling Public Health Nurse (PHN) positions. Over the last 6 years there has been a 100% vacancy rate. This does not mean that all nurses had resigned but that some open positions have been filled over and over. Part of the problem is that PH annual starting salaries at Fulton County Health Department, right next door, are \$10,000 to \$12,000 more than Fayette. Another problem is the PHN to population ratio: in 1990 it was 1:9602, but by 2005 it had gone up to 1:13511. If an LPN is added to the staff that ratio would still increase to 1:14306, if no LPN is added it would climb to 1:16213. A PHN position remained open from July to March, with a few weeks exception when nurses were hired and quit after a few days or weeks. Average revenue per nurse over that period was \$30,951, so lack of this nurse cost that potential revenue.

Current challenges for Physical Health include: Emergency Preparedness and other added programs; expansion of current programs; increased accountability; impending retirement of 3 nurses in the next 3 years, wherein 68 years of Public Health experience will leave, with no succession planning to replace these nurses; non-competitive salaries and increasingly complex office visits. Environmental Health challenges include on-call responsibility; recent addition of enforcement of the *Georgia Smokefree Act of 2005*; administration of the West Nile Virus program and the Pool Program. Increases in EH workload from 1999 to 2005 include: food service evaluations which went from 187 to 566; Pool Inspections which went from 0 to 112; complaints went from 221 to 364; telephone conferences increased from 7,582 to 13,720 and individual conferences went from 2,923 to 7,686. In addition, between 1980 and 2005 restaurant numbers went from 11 to 264, an increase of over 24 times. State law requires 2 inspections per year, but EH staff attempts 4 per year. On February 15, 2006 new state regulations went into effect, which will require much more training and time to perform inspections—but no staff additions to handle these increased responsibilities. In addition to state requirements, EH staff works closely with Fayette County. Some county-requested services include: serving on Fayette County Technical Review Committee; inspection of Community Sewage Systems (not a state

requirement); review of all building permits; not only new permits but all permits, including any permit issued: for example, adding a deck or paving a driveway.

Financial support sources include: Grant-in-Aid, WIC, fees for services, and funding from Fayette County. Grant-in-Aid support has been dropping over the past few years, only increasing by 2.4%, while fees comprise 48% of current funding. WIC funding has gone up for the past year, but includes funding from the District Office to support the nutritionist salary for 2 days a week. Fees for services are collected for the fiscal year, divided by 12, and expended the following year under the title of PYPI, or Previous Year Program Income.

To summarize, changes include: Fayette County employee numbers have increased by 67% to compensate with the projected tripling of population since 1980; numbers of restaurants have dramatically increased; programs have been added or current programs expanded for both EH and Physical Health; yet health department staff numbers have only increased by 3 members or 16.2% over the same time period. Need has outpaced resources by far. Ms. Redwood commented that she had been awestruck by the volume of work put forth by Fayette County Health Department staff, especially in comparison with surrounding counties. Ms. Crowe replied that care must be taken when comparing different county health departments, as types of services might not be comparable. The question was raised regarding the status of increased EH septic fees; Mr. Fehr said the Board of Commissioners had heard the request and wanted to consider increases at budget time, and so the project was moving forward.

Presentation of the Budget was made by Ms. Crowe. The total budget is \$1,552,097, an increase over FY 2006 of 10% or \$113,490. Included is a 6% increase of the salary and fringes line item, to include a Cost of Living (COLA) increase voted by the legislature, merit increases, and 3 additional positions: one of which will reinstate a EH specialist position; an EH secretary, and an LPN. Rationale for these positions is: the EH secretary will replace the half-time secretary who will retire; the EH specialist will allow generation of more fee revenue, and the LPN will relieve the RNs from busywork and non-revenue tasks such as audits and WIC visits. Other items include use of EH current year fees, which is necessary to allow for the increased budget amount (See attachment #1). The health department is on track year to date, both for fee collection and expenditures, in part to due the open PH nurse position for 4 months. The FY 2007 budget shows a County Non-participating amount of \$85,000, to reflect the 3 additional positions; normally County Participating and County Non-participating are combined.

It was stressed that PH nurses are keeping up with current workload by unpaid overtime. Rarely do nurses leave the building before 6 or 7 pm, even though the County Nurse Manager requested staff vacate the building by 5:30 for safety reasons. Their sense of professionalism and dedication demands the job be done, even at the expense of personal time. It is feared that such an overload will burn staff out. The board was concerned that salaries should be addressed, perhaps even to add another nurse in addition to the proposed LPN. This would be difficult as space is a concern; adding one LPN would alleviate busywork and relieve RNs. Ms. Crowe stressed that merit increases were included in the salary line item, which increased morale considerably. Ms. Rutherford said she would like to see another LPN position added; Ms. Crowe and Ms. Wortham said that issue could be addressed at a later time and the budget could always be amended. Ms. Rutherford felt that the current budget addressed immediate concerns but that further work was necessary to keep up with demand. She stressed that staff needed to continue to work on these pressing matters. Ms. Crowe mentioned that a presentation such as the one given at this meeting had not been previously done, that it was felt to be important to bring the

board up to date on how things stood, and that staff would continue to work on these issues. Ms. Redwood pointed out that she had requested a commissioner be present in Mr. VanLandingham's place, and that Ms. Crowe had requested that as well, and yet no commissioner was at the meeting.

Dr. Strain thanked staff for the time and effort put into the PowerPoint presentation. He felt that it was imperative that these new positions be filled to alleviate the work overload, and that revenue be increased as well, in order to be less dependent on outside support. Ms. Crowe replied that the health department walked a fine line; fees should not be raised higher than those clients who desperately need services could afford but should be enough to make the health department less dependent on outside support. Fees can only be expected to generate about 50% of total revenue at best.

Ms. Rutherford motioned that the budget be approved as presented; Ms. Redwood seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. The motion passed unanimously. Ms. Peterson said the PowerPoint presentation was a great help and it was a great job.

DRIP IRRIGATION SYSTEMS: Mr. Fehr and Mr. Davenport updated the board on Drip Irrigation Systems. Mr. Fehr said that some years ago drip line irrigation systems were approved by the state, currently are used as community sewage systems and are overseen by the Environmental Protection Department (EPD). After some use it was apparent that anaerobic systems had problems and did not work well without the addition of oxygen, like an aerobic system. Problems have decreased since implementing the requirement of adding oxygen to drip systems. Mr. Fehr said that by request of the county EH would be more involved in oversight of these type systems, although there is no state requirement to do so. Brian Boutelle reported that the Millwood Subdivision system in Tyrone was recently cited by the EPD for problems. Residents using the system have been given an EPD 800 number that they could call as necessary, but such a call might not mean an immediate response. Since that system was approved by the EPD, oversight of it was its responsibility. Should the system fail, EPD would then take other steps, beyond their current citation and request for changes. It is not known what those steps would be. The Millwood Subdivision system's owners have been requested to provide documentation of requirements to bring the system back into compliance.

Ms. Redwood expressed concern that raw sewage on the ground might mean a health hazard for children in the neighborhood, especially since there was no signage or fences to keep them away from the area. She wondered if the board of health had any responsibility and what the county's responsibility would be if this had been an individual home, not a community system.

Mr. Fehr said the area had been examined and no raw sewage was found, but lime had been used as a disinfectant, leading to the conclusion that there had been a problem and the citation had followed. He said residents had been requested to keep away from the area and to apply lime as needed. No health problems have been reported from this issue; further steps could be taken if deemed necessary by the board. EPD remains the enforcing authority for the Millwood system. Residents had been given Mr. Fehr's home phone number in the event they would not be able to reach EPD with complaints. Ms. Redwood said she knew of 2 instances of cases of hepatitis in Marnelle Mobile Home Park that she felt came from exposure to raw sewage. She wondered if fecal coliform testing could be done on the standing water.

Mr. Fehr mentioned that there was always joint oversight with other enforcement agencies in sewage treatment and food service inspection. He did not see any problem working with such authorities on this type problem, as there had always been a spirit of cooperation. The board expressed concern that not enough was being done to protect the area children, and wanted to know what recourse it had, in this instance. Mr. Fehr stated that once the state responded with how it planned to handle potential failure of this system, EH would work with affected residents to arrive at the best resolution. The board was concerned that standing water needed to be checked today for potential raw sewage and requested that EH check that out. Mr. Fehr agreed to do that.

Mr. Davenport presented the legal aspect of the board's involvement with community sewage disposal systems. He updated the board on legalities of this joint effort. In the event of sewage treatment failure, which is considered to be a public health threat, homeowners are then requested to cooperate with authorities to take immediate steps to correct the problem. If they do not, other measures can be taken; the most extreme of which is to turn off the residence's water. This is not the preferred treatment but a last resort. Mr. Davenport will confer with Mr. Fehr this morning to determine what steps should be taken in the Millwood case. One solution under consideration for future systems is to pipe both the original field line and the replacement line during initial installation, which would be expensive but would make correction of system failure a simple matter of switching a valve. Fayette County Board of Commissioners are currently deciding what role they want to play regarding ownership of community systems.

STAFF REPORTS: Mr. Fehr said that the current proposal to increase EH fees would be addressed at budget time.

Ms. Callison gave the board a brief update on the department's difficulty in hiring and keeping PH nurses. Low salaries and PH requirements make it very difficult to hire and keep nurses. Ms. Callison stressed that Fayette County Health Department is very fortunate to have nurses with many years of experience in Public Health. The open position has been filled and it is hoped that the new nurse will remain. She mentioned the pandemic flu tabletop drill, originally set for April 18th which has been rescheduled for April 25th, at 1279 Hwy 54 on the 3rd floor at 10:00 am.

There were no further staff reports.

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Peterson, seconded by Ms. Rutherford. The motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:28 am.

Michael Strain, MD, Chair

Merle Crowe, Secretary

