

APPROVED
5/2/07

**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
MINUTES
April 18, 2007 – 3:00 P.M.
SCOTT HEYMAN CONFERENCE ROOM**

Present: N. Shinagawa, Chair, M. Robertson, M. Koplinka-Loehr, M. Sigler, Vice Chair
Excused: F. Proto
Staff: A. Cole, Health Department; S. Martel-Moore, Deputy County Administrator; M. Lynch, Public Information Officer; L. Holmes, Office for the Aging; K. Schlather, N. Burston, Human Services Coalition; B. Falcao, Health Planning Council; J. Mattick, Workforce Development; P. Carey, Social Services Commissioner; R. DeLuca, Mental Health Commissioner; K. Fuller, Deputy Clerk
Guests: C. Nocera, J. Ward, American Red Cross; C. Sanchirico, Catholic Charities; J. Alderson, Homelessness Marathon; W. Skinner, Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit

Call to Order

Chair Shinagawa called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

Human Services Coalition

Health Planning Council

Ms. Falcao reviewed written material provided to Committee members. She explained the difference in services provided, licensing/certification requirements, and income/benefit levels for Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA), Home Health Aide (HHA), Personal Care Aide (PCA), as well as alternative care providers to individuals on Medicaid, receiving Expanded In-home Services for the Elderly Program (EISEP), and private-pay situations. Ms. Falcao reported the majority of personal care (80%) is done by family and/or friends of the patients. Various staff members assisted in explaining how an individual's service plan may include a combination of the various services offered, either due to the different requirements (personal care vs. medical care), availability of service provider, etc.

The Committee reviewed statistical graphs, which although do not provide all information on home health care, indicated a shift has occurred over the years from utilization of Home Health Aides to Personal Care Aides. It was explained that the reason for the shift is due several factors, including a decrease in coverage for Home Health Aide services. Part of the reason for the shift is a restructuring of payment schedules for Medicare. What was formerly covered in full by Federal funding (Medicare), now has shifted to Medicaid, with funding comprised of a combination of Federal (50%), State (40%), and local share (10%). This has created a shortage of Personal Care Aides, who are unable to provide service to all seeking it, resulting in waiting lists, reduction of hours, etc. When the consumer directed program became available many individuals decided to utilize the program that enabled family and/or friends to provide the personal care services.

A discussion followed regarding training, staff retention, and other obstacles in the personal care health field. Training has been difficult to organize, with a history indicating periods when training progressed well followed by periods when it fell through. Ms. Falcao said part of the difficulty is that individuals are not paid during the two-week training. Additionally, these positions often do not have adequate benefits and also require an individual to have their own transportation. Upon completion of the training, there may not be a guarantee of hours, or an individual may have to travel from home to home in order to secure enough hours to make this type of work viable.

Ms. Carey said of the initial proposed budget for the State Board of Health suggested dropping personal care from the Medicaid eligible list as a result of incidents of abuse in New York City. Fortunately this did not occur and the funding was left in the budget. At this time, no discussions regarding salary levels have taken place. She thought that if the Medicaid rate were moved up it could possibly result in a salary increase, but it is unknown. Ms. Cole informed the Committee that although nursing home staff often have collective bargaining units, most home health aides and personal care aides do not. It was noted that current court cases are challenging what defines self-employment as certain positions do not fall into the minimum wage laws. It is believed it would affect the private individuals performing the work.

The Committee briefly discussed the need to establish career ladders between the health professions. Ms. Mattick said it would be helpful to educate individuals of the possibilities available, coupled with having their experience enhance their employment. Mr. Shinagawa expressed a desire to have the employers meet with the Committee to share information on how the break-out of expenses vs. fees impacts salaries. He was informed that it may be difficult due to the proprietary nature of the businesses.

Following a discussion, the Committee expressed a desire to review information and determine what assistance they may give to minimize stumbling blocks to individuals wishing to enter in the health care field at a personal care level. Ms. Mattick said the ability to have more open-entry/open-exit training program would be helpful; currently it may require a wait of six weeks to start a training course. In addition, making it easy for the four agencies to provide training would also help.

Ms. Carey said the concerns noted are mirrored throughout the state. She spoke of a Long-Term Care conference taking place in Albany on June 21; more information on these issues from the State perspective may become available.

Ms. Falcao spoke of the upcoming Uninsured Week. The Health Planning Council is launching a single telephone number for uninsured individuals to call to obtain information on programs available.

Homeless Statistical Information and Discussion

Ms. Schlather, Human Services Coalition Director, reported of the HUD requirement that every two years a count of homeless individuals must be taken during the last week in January. This year the count, completed on January 26, 2007, involved many individuals going to various locations throughout the County.

Ms. Carey has provided members with the 2006 statistics as an example of what may be provided and inquired if any specific additional information would be desired. She would like to provide the information on a quarterly basis for informational purposes. She stressed that data is not always accurate as a result of interpretation or a desire not to disclose information by the client. Following discussion the following requests were made:

- A breakout of individuals vs. family units.
- Age grouping of individuals using shelters, with grouping to include a breakout between 0-15, 16-17, 18-20, and 21-25.
- How many are repeat shelter users.
- Employed vs. unemployed. (It was noted that DSS unemployable is one specific category, subject to change).

Mr. Nocera noted that the majority of individuals in the shelter are there for less than thirty days. Mr. Ward spoke of a database installation that will assist in clarification of the make-up of individuals utilizing shelters (family unit makeup, individual, etc.). The Committee was informed that the category of parolees utilizing shelter indicated stays in excess of 30 days; this is due to several factors including lack of planning upon release as well as individuals who may have committed sexual offenses.

Mr. Nocera reported this January's census was the third conducted in the County. The 2005 census resulted in a recommendation to attempt to try to reach more individuals that would fall under the category as vulnerable, which was attempted. Mr. Nocera said that although the cases are comparable (95 in 2005, 96 in 2007), the number of people has increased from 106 to 160; however, the new count includes the vulnerable category that was not included previously. If removing that particular category and compare, 50 cases are homeless or chronically homeless, representing 79 people, 8 of those being chronic cases by Federal definition (homeless for one continuous year, or four episodes within the last three years). Normally, within this community, the standard is a one-time event occurring with a stay of less than thirty days. Mr. Nocera said that if the reason for the homeless period is not addressed it could spiral and become a chronic condition.

Mr. Nocera indicated the count is completed at a pre-peak time for individuals seeking shelter. He believes that overspending during the holiday season, or individuals who were briefly taken in now being asked to leave results in some individuals not having the ability to pay rent and therefore were evicted from their homes. Statistically, the census showed: 84% were Tompkins County residents; 46% judged to have a disabling condition; 61% were males, 48% were homeless for less than 30 days; 73% were homeless for the first time; and 31% were between the ages of 45 – 55, which is a new situation. Homeless and chronic, the people in families doubled from 12 to 24, the number of single individuals decreased by almost half. He said there are some promising indications, but it is wise to remain cautious as 2006 had a large number of bed nights. Mr. Nocera believes if there is a change it is just on the cusp and drawing conclusions from a one-night survey is not warranted.

Catholic Charities

Ms. Sanchirico, Director, said the interaction between homelessness and her agency is through the security deposit program funded through the City CDBG process, to assist families/individuals in obtaining rental property. At this time, her agency does not have any more funds to operate the program until October. She expressed concern since there is obviously a greater need than can be provided. Ms. Sanchirico expressed a desire to further explain the programs provided to individuals. She reviewed a handout that provided statistical information on the assistance programs offered by her agency that indicated a variety of needs of low-income individuals.

Ms. Robertson spoke of the security deposit program deficit and inquired what would be needed to carry the program through until the next grant. Ms. Sanchirico said it would need between \$24,000 to \$30,000. Ms. Robertson suggested the Committee consider a resolution requesting Contingency Funds for this program be brought forward at the next meeting.

Homelessness Marathon Radio Program

Mr. Alderson, host of the annual Homelessness Marathon Radio Program and journalist, provided historical and current information to the Committee regarding the homeless situation in America. He addressed the fact that during President Reagan's administration the building of low-income housing was removed from the budget and has not since been restored. In addition, he spoke of the elimination of low-income housing during urban renewal, to construct large community structures, further adding to a decline of affordable housing. Mr. Alderson shared information that during the early 1960's an individual could rent a room for \$.25; today's rates have increased 40-fold, making it unaffordable. He compared it to a \$200/month apartment now having a rental fee of \$14,000.

Mr. Alderson stressed homelessness is not simply due to lack of work or disability; that individuals may work, or receive disability checks – but their income is not sufficient to maintain affordable housing. He provided information on recent decisions in Fresno, California that will help homeless individuals and suggests that a municipality set-aside specific land to allow the homeless individuals to safely congregate. In addition, the plan should include a main staging area that will provide the homeless individuals and families with contact to service providers and a bus route, and possibly an area that would allow these individuals to offer homemade crafts for sale.

The Committee briefly discussed the matter. Mr. Sigler indicated that a large question would be the liability associated with such a site. Mr. Alderson offered to obtain the information and pass it on to the Committee.

Mr. Sigler was excused at this time (4:55 p.m.).

Mental Health

Mr. DeLuca spoke of the tragedy at Virginia Tech and noted various agencies have been offering support as needed, and a vigil will be held at Cornell University.

He reported that as a result of efficiencies he anticipates there will not be any deficit at the end of 2007. Mr. DeLuca provided a handout that showed revenue and expenditure changes in 2007 as a result of personnel cost changes. As a result of not filling positions immediately or leaving them open, he has been able to offset other amendments to hours, etc. to a point that is almost break-even.

Mr. DeLuca stressed three points to the Committee: (1) new revenue streams have been brought in to the Department; (2) the Department has undergone consolidation in an effort to reduce expenses, and (3) at this time it appears that 2007 will end similarly to 2006. Mr. Koplinka-Loehr indicated he would like to be able to see 2008 information, including short-term and long-term impacts. Mr. DeLuca said there are many variables; his conservative prediction is not certain yet how increases in personnel lines will be met. The Committee was informed that this next year would have a higher turn-around in staff due to retirements. Mr. Koplinka-Loehr requested the Committee be informed of any areas that assistance may be required.

Health Department

Well Permitting Program Update

Mr. Andersson provided members with a written update of the well permitting program. He stated two public hearings are scheduled to hear comments. At this time, approximately six telephone calls have been received with questions.

Mr. Andersson provided Chair Shinagawa with a copy of the Environmental Health Annual Report. The text will be included in the Health Department Annual Report.

Human Rights Commission

Ms. Martel-Moore announced B.R.E.A.T.H.E., a new creative outlet program Building, Respect, Equality and Activism Through Hip-Hop Expression, is holding a Spoken Word Showcase on April 20th from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. The event, held at the Tompkins County Public Library's Borg Warner Room, is free and open to the public, with free food and open mic opportunities.

B.R.E.A.T.H.E. workshops have recently been held at Ithaca's Southside Community Center. The program also has been conducted at the Gossett Residential Center in a collaboration between B.R.E.A.T.H.E. Co-Chairs and the Lehman Alternative Community School's Community Service Class. Creative expression workshops also have been held at the Learning Web, local schools and other community organizations.

Ms. Martel-Moore stated that at this time approximately 200 tickets have been sold for the Human Rights Commission Annual Dinner.

Liaison Reports

Mr. Stevenson reported that as a result of the 2007 Over Target Request, coupled with a recent grant received from Senator Winner's office, 241 new Personal Emergency Rescue units (PERS) have been purchased. Mr. Stevenson noted he is unable to attend the next meeting on July 11th and requested a substitute liaison.

Adjournment

On motion the meeting adjourned at 5:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Karen Fuller, Deputy Clerk