

Allegheny County Council

*County of Allegheny
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Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 30, 2016

4:00 PM

Conference Room I

Committee on Health & Human Services

*John Palmiere, Chair; Thomas Baker, James Ellenbogen, Nick Futules, Cindy Kirk,
Paul Klein, Ed Kress, Robert Macey, Sue Means*

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:03.

Invited Guests:

William D. McKain, CPA, Allegheny County Manager

Dr. Karen Hacker, M.D., M.P.H., Director, Allegheny County Health Department

Julia Ochs, Jewish Healthcare Foundation

Mr. McKain was present from the Office of the County Manager.

Dr. Hacker and Dr. Mertz were present from the Allegheny County Health Department.

Ms. Och was present from the Jewish Healthcare Foundation.

Mr. Barker and Mr. Szymanski were present from the Office of County Council.

II. Roll Call

Members Present: 4 - John Palmiere, Cindy Kirk, Paul Klein and Sue Means

Members Absent: 4 - Jim Ellenbogen, Nick Futules, Ed Kress and Bob Macey

Members Phone: 1 - Tom Baker

Members 1 - Michael Finnerty

Non-Members:

III. Approval of Minutes

[9530-16](#)

Motion to approve the minutes of the June 24, 2015 meeting of the Committee on Health & Human Services.

A motion was made by Means, seconded by Kirk, that this matter be Passed. The motion carried by a unanimous vote.

IV. Agenda Items

Discussion Topics:

Zika Virus Update

AIDS Free Pittsburgh

Zika Update

At the request of the Chair, Dr. Hacker gave a brief presentation regarding the Zika virus, noting that it is similar to Denge Fever, West Nile virus, and yellow fever, and is also spread by mosquitoes that tend to be most active during the day and live in standing water, often near households. Dr. Hacker indicated that two species of mosquitoes that are found in the U.S. may carry the virus, one of which is not found in Pennsylvania. Dr. Hacker discussed the effects of the virus, noting that is of primary concern for unborn fetuses, an dindicated that there have been no documented cases of the virus being transmitted in the continental U.S., so all cases appear to have been the result of travelling abroad or sexual transmission, rather than mosquito bites.

Dr. Hacker and Dr. Mertz noted that Pennsylvania has no capacity for testing for Zika, so all tests are performed by the CDC in Ft. Collins, Colorado. Dr. Hacker discussed the symptoms, noting that most adult cases are asymptomatic, but the ones that do present tend to resemble the flu. Dr. Hacker described the effect of the virus on unborn fetuses, indicating that microcephaly is fairly strongly connected with Zika, but that it is not currently clear at what point during pregnancy the virus causes the condition. Dr. Hacker noted that the area of concern is pregnant women or women who intend to become pregnant, and that the criteria for testing are strict and tests are prioritized fairly aggressively pursuant to those criteria.

In response to a question from Ms. Kirk, Dr. Mertz noted that the best time to test is while symptoms are present, but barring symptoms presenting, between 2 and 12 weeks after exposure is preferred.

Dr. Hacker noted that, apart from travel restriction and sexual abstinence, the best protection is mosquito avoidance or repellent and, to this end, controlling the mosquito population is a priority.

Ms. Kirk and Dr. Hacker discussed situations in which water can be left standing near homes.

Ms. Means and Dr. Hacker discussed the upcoming Olympic Games in Brazil and the potential economic impact of the virus.

In response to a question from Mr. Klein, Dr. Hacker noted that there does not appear that the virus is much more dangerous to elderly individuals or other populations that may have weakened immune systems.

Dr. Hacker discussed mosquito control initiatives in the County, noting that states with warmer climates have greater potential for the virus to be an issue there, and expressed a belief that the virus was unlikely in her opinion to become a significant concern in Pennsylvania.

AIDS Free Pittsburgh

At the request of the Chair, Ms. Och gave a presentation on the AIDS Free Pittsburgh initiative, noting that Allegheny County has the second highest incidence of HIV/AIDS diagnoses in Pennsylvania, behind only Philadelphia. Ms. Och noted that, in 2003, there were 47 new cases, but that each year since the new diagnoses have been between 100 and 180, and that the relatively consistent rate is a concern. Ms. Och discussed transmission vectors, and noted that UNAIDS has set goals of 90% diagnosis, treatment, and viral suppression by 2020.

Ms. Och noted that San Francisco has experienced an approximately 30% decrease in cases and deaths over the last several years, and that this serves as something of a model. Ms. Och indicated that the program's goal is to normalize testing, increase access to preventative drugs, and standardize early access to care once a diagnosis is made, with subcommittees dedicated to supporting these three areas. Ms. Och discussed the initiative's efforts since its formation just over one year ago and some of the efforts it will be making in the near term.

In response to a question from Mr. Klein, Ms. Och discussed the funding that is available

for the initiative from the Allegheny Health Network and UPMC, and Dr. Hacker noted that no new County funding is currently going to the initiative.

In response to a question from Ms. Means, Ms. Och noted that the initiative would be greatly appreciative of an expression of support from the Council. Mr. Finnerty, Ms. Means and Mr. Klein expressed support for the idea.

Ms. Kirk and Dr. Hacker discussed blood testing protocols and issues that may exist with obtaining consent to testing, since separate consent is required for HIV testing.

In response to a question from Mr. Finnerty, Dr. Hacker described the potential for spreading the virus prior to an AIDS diagnosis, and noted that prompt diagnosis and antiviral medications can greatly reduce this potential.

Mr. Baker thanked everyone for their presentation, and he discussed the potential merits of educational programs in high school and college settings with Ms. Och.

V. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 4:59.