



Herbert
Henderson
Office of
Minority
Affairs

COVID-19 Advisory Commission on African American Disparities

MINUTES

January 28, 2021

7:33 AM

Via Zoom

Chair: Jill Upson, Chairperson and Director
Herbert Henderson Office of Minority Affairs (HHOMA)

Commissioners: Pastor Rahsaan Armand, Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church
Owens Brown, State Conference of NAACP
Joylynn Fix, WV Offices of the Insurance Commission
Delegate Sean Hornbuckle, House District 16, Cabell County
Mike Jones, Kanawha Institute for Social Research and Action (KISRA)
Reverend James Patterson, Institute Church of the Nazarene
Senator Patricia Puertas-Rucker, Jefferson County, Senatorial District 16
Tiffany Samuels, WVU Cancer Institute
Keisha Saunders, Tug River Health Clinic

Presenters: Dr. Ayne Amjad, Commissioner, BPH; State Health Officer
Dr. James Arnaez, MPH PhD, Lead Epidemiologist, Health Statistics Center
Sonia Chambers, Executive Director, West Virginia Health Information Network
Dr. Clay Marsh, WV COVID-19 Czar, WVU Medicine Vice President

The meeting was called to order at 7:32 a.m. by Director Jill Upson.

Dr. Clay Marsh provided a weekly update on COVID-19:

- Global reductions in COVID in the rate of new case transmission and hospitalizations; No reduction in deaths yet in United States.
- Israel reported a reduction in hospitalizations after the first dose of the Pizer vaccine.
- Average age of COVID-19 deaths is 77 years old.
- CDC's risk of death rates from COVID-19
- United States will need to increase molecular virology testing for the genetic mutations.
- Data suggests that in-classroom learning is safer than being in the community.

Director Jill Upson asked for clarification about the death rates.

Dr. Marsh explained that the death rate has not decreased in the United States; comparatively, West Virginia is starting to slow. The reduction in hospitalizations, ventilations, and ICU patients is a manifestation of vaccine administration. He cautioned to continue to wear masks if you have been vaccinated.

Dr. Marsh attributed the use of monoclonal antibodies to the reduction in the severity of hospitalizations and death. In the last two months, monoclonal antibodies have been administered in correctional facilities and nursing homes. He encouraged aggression towards vaccination and wearing masks.

Director Upson read a question from the chat asking if DNA sequencing is done with each COVID-19 positive test.

Dr. Marsh stated that the COVID virus is an RNA virus, not a DNA virus. The Centers for Disease Control has a program to do that, but it is not robust. WV is working on building capacity to do the sequencing in-state, which will enable testing for the mutant strains of virus.

Reverend James Patterson discussed the process and strategy used by PAAC to support the COVID-19 testing and vaccination efforts in communities of color. He shared that one team member in the Eastern Panhandle has tested positive for COVID-19 and the team is now under quarantine.

Director Upson asked which counties were the areas of focus.

Rev. Patterson explained that, based on 2012 census data, Kanawha, Cabell, Raleigh, Berkeley, Jefferson or Mercer.

Director Upson responded that there is a large Latino population in the Eastern Panhandle area.

Rev. Patterson shared that one member of his team in the area is bilingual.

Tiffany Samuels requested a weekly report from PAAC's testing events be shared at the meetings to assess where help is needed.

Rev. Patterson responded that a weekly report would be possible, but the data would be a week behind. He added that more discussion was needed if the task force wants to give scheduling input.

Ms. Samuels asked if the National Guard testing in the communities of color would continue. Rev. Patterson encouraged the task force to continue its efforts. PAAC is unable to test and vaccinate entire communities of color. There was additional discussion about testing in the communities of color across the state.

Owens Brown stated that the role of MIH should have been greater; asking why the role has not been expanded to the Minority Health Institute and if the mission is different from the task force.

Rev. Patterson explained that PAAC is working with Dr. Woart, whom he has worked with for years. PAAC has worked with Marshall University has worked with PAAC since its inception.

Secretary Bill Crouch added that he had invited Dr. Anthony Woart to attend the meeting. He stated that it is difficult to include everyone all of the time; participation and suggestions are wanted. Changing the focus of this group to look at recommendations and to get to get specific information to really tackle this problem has been discussed. Reverend Patterson was able to get out into the small communities where we were not getting people tested. He concluded by stating that no one is being excluded in any way.

Owens Brown stated that the MIH is a state agency and would provide great input.

Director Upson added that Dr. Woart had been invited from the beginning and was able to join the call today.

Colonel Tanya McGonegal shared that the focus of the WVNG has been on vaccine distribution. In addition, the WVNG has continued to support the testing, cleaning, and disinfecting efforts. Colonel McGonegal added that more soldiers are returning from Washington, D.C. this weekend; able to support COVID-19 efforts. She advised that if there are any needs to ask her in the chat and she will direct it to the proper teams.

Dr. Marsh and Director Upson both thanked the Colonel McGonegal and the WVNG for their support. Rev. Patterson added that the WVNG has supported PAAC by providing sanitization services while his crew is preparing.

Sonia Chambers shared that the WV Health Information Network has been working with Dr. Arnaez to reduce the number of positive test results that were missing race and ethnicity data by 50 percent. Relying on partners in Maryland, additional data from the Eastern Panhandle has been identified. She offered to assist Rev. Patterson in identifying race and ethnicity data in the testing and vaccinations.

Dr. James Arnaez reported that approximately 50,000 or 30% of the sample had race data from the WVHIN. The missing data has improved.

Director Upson asked about current trends in infection rates and hospitalization rates for the African American and Latino Community.

Dr. Arnaez stated that he was unable to access the file this week. He provided the following highlights.

- Increased cases in the African American and other communities of color since early January.
- Gender splits have remained consistent in the past month-54% for both African American and Other Race
- Bulk of Hispanic population is concentrated in the Eastern Panhandle.
- Other Race is primarily concentrated in central, eastern, and northeastern West Virginia.

Director Upson asked if the median age of black males is still younger than the general population.

Dr. Arnaez stated that the median age for African American and Other Race categories is younger than the White community by 10 years. The median age for Monongalia was in the twenties. He will share additional gender data with the group later in the afternoon. Dr. Arnaez noted that the southern region has approximately 50% missing data in the past month.

Joylynn Fix shared that the health insurance enrollment period will reopen February 15 to May 15.

Owens Brown stated that the fact that few African Americans have been vaccinated in West Virginia should be discussed; possibly changing the focus of the group.

Director Upson stated that Rev. Patterson and Colonel McGonegal did address concerns about increasing vaccinations among African Americans.

Owens Brown added that, given the staffing limitations, Rev. Patterson is only able to test about 50 people per day, which is a small number.

Secretary Crouch stated that he initially called Rev. Patterson to increase the impact in those communities. It has been difficult getting enough vaccines. He added that he wants the committee to focus on minorities and how we can impact those minorities going forward.

Rev. Patterson explained that some providers set aside vaccination slots for African Americans aged 65 and older. He added that it is taking time for PAAC to get up and running, but they can service more than 50 people per day.

The meeting adjourned at 8:34 a.m.

*No votes or actions were taken at the meeting.

**A recording of the full meeting is available at <https://minorityaffairs.wv.gov/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx> .