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## **COVID-19 Advisory Commission on African American Disparities**

### **MINUTES**

September 23, 2021

7:30 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  
Romelia Hodges, StriveN4  
Mike Jones, Kanawha Institute for Social Research and Action (KISRA)  
Senator Patricia Puertas-Rucker, Jefferson County, Senatorial District 16  
Tiffany Samuels, WVU Cancer Institute  
Keisha Saunders, Tug River Health Clinic
- Absent:** Reverend James Patterson, Institute Church of the Nazarene  
Delegate Sean Hornbuckle, House District 16, Cabell County  
Delegate Caleb Hanna, Nicholas County, House District 44
- Presenters:** Dr. Ayne Amjad, Commissioner, BPH, State Health Officer  
Dr. James Arnaez, MPH PhD, Lead Epidemiologist, Health Statistics Center  
Dr. Clay Marsh, WV COVID-19 Czar, WVU Medicine Vice President

Chairperson Jill Upson called the meeting to order at 7:33 a.m. The Chair shared that Secretary Bill Crouch discuss the initiative with Reverend Patterson, who emailed an update to be shared in his absence.

The Chair asked Dr. Clay Marsh to share his update.

Dr. Marsh provided an update on the surge of the Delta variant of COVID-19, reporting that the single highest day of COVID-19 hospitalizations occurred yesterday. The CDC will soon recommend booster

shots for those over 65 years old and had their 2<sup>nd</sup> dose more than six months prior. Dr. Marsh discussed the variations in potency between the Moderna, Johnson and Johnson, and Pfizer. Currently, 80% of hospitalizations are unvaccinated, while 90% of ventilator patients in the ICU are unvaccinated. Several larger hospital systems are operating under crisis standards of care; stretching the thin numbers of staff to accommodate needs. Dr. Marsh added that the monoclonal antibodies are showing an 80% reduction in hospitalization and severe illness. Dr. Marsh expressed his appreciation of the efforts of the task force, but that the work is not done.

The Chair asked if there were any questions for Dr. Marsh.

Dr. James Arnaez asked whether the vaccine double-counting reported in the news is specific to a particular demographic group.

Dr. Marsh responded that the contactors had been used to manage the data from the CDC. There was some double-counting of those who were vaccinated at pharmacies, resulting in approximately 150,000 that were double-counted of the two million that were given. He added that they are working through the data to see how it will impact the vaccination totals.

Secretary Bill Crouch added that there has been great effort to ensure the accuracy of data. Adjustments are being made to account for the double-count by the CDC.

Seeing no hands raised, the Chair requested Dr. Ayne Amjad to provide a report.

Dr. Amjad provided an update on the Funding Availability Announcement (FAA) awards. The AFA awards were sent out a few weeks ago for the first round and a second round will be submitted. There was some money remaining and the application deadlines will be shared. Dr. Amjad added that the monoclonal antibodies are available through several hospital systems with hopes of pharmacies and FQHC soon offering them, as well. She discussed the qualifiers to receive monoclonal antibodies.

Chairperson Upson stated she would get the updated FAA deadlines from Amy Atkins. She added that PAAC did receive a letter of award in the first round FAA awards.

Secretary Crouch encouraged the group to watch for the FAA announcements on the DHHR website. He expressed disappointment that more applications were not received; the money must get out to the communities. Secretary Crouch discussed the struggles with the healthcare system in Idaho, which is similar in size to West Virginia.

Chairperson Upson shared that assistance with paying childcare was brought up for discussion at the listening tour in Monongalia County.

Secretary Crouch stated that there has not been a lapse in assistance in childcare programs and asked for the Chair to forward the person's information to him to share with the appropriate Bureau.

Chairperson Upson asked if people should be getting paid while in quarantine after testing positive.

Secretary Crouch responded that it is decided by the individual employer and to his knowledge, not required. He added that 14 days is not CDC guidance.

Dr. Amjad confirmed that it compensation during quarantine is decided by the employer. The CDC has shortened quarantine guidelines to 10 days. Dr. Amjad added that she has seen information online to help during quarantine.

Chairperson Upson added that those in attendance at the listening tour in Monongalia County were aware that the County was keeping with the 14-day quarantine.

Owens Brown shared his observation that people have become desensitized to the coronavirus and death, in general. He shared the costs of the average hospital stay for COVID patients that were found on the website [www.pubmed.gov](http://www.pubmed.gov). He reported the daily cost for ICU mechanical ventilation was \$10,794, and no mechanical ventilation was \$6,670, which can result to hospital bills of \$42,000 or greater. Mr. Brown suggested that sharing the costs associated with the hospital stays in a public service announcement.

Chairperson Upson opened the floor for the panelists to respond.

Dr. Marsh commented that Owens Brown was correct regarding the costs of care. He cautioned against stigmatizing a group of people who do not share the same beliefs about vaccination. The real challenge is that hospitals are running low on capacity, which affects ICU and ventilator care for those that do not have COVID.

Mike Jones commented that the approach to the virus has become passive. He added that it is the virus that he does not trust, not the vaccine.

Senator Patricia Rucker added that she does not agree with the sentiments that were shared. Vaccinated people are also capable of catching and transmitting the virus. She urged caution in trying to force people to go against their beliefs. She added that the vaccine does not stop the transmission and that people who choose not to get vaccinated should not be blamed.

Dr. Marsh stated that recent data suggests otherwise. He then explained the latest data from Singapore, which suggests that full vaccination does reduce the risk of transmission.

Senator Rucker asked to see the study because there are contradicting studies. She stated that her understanding is that many of the studies have not been peer-reviewed.

Mike Jones clarified that he did not state that vaccinations should be mandated.

The Chair introduced Dr. James Arnaez to share his data presentation.

Dr. Arnaez shared his data presentation that included health behaviors and the Health Belief Model, which could be used to develop messaging. He reported that the number of full vaccinations for African Americans has slowly increased by 600, in comparison to the White and Other Race category which have increased by 20,000. There were over new 5,500 cases in African Americans and over 12,000 among the white population during the week of September 10<sup>th</sup> -16<sup>th</sup>. Dr. Arnaez stated that the high numbers in the unknown category were likely attributed to the longer times to reconcile the high volume of data.

Romelia Hodges expressed concern for the large gatherings occurring across the state noting that any increases in positivity rates will not show until two weeks later. She then shared a patient's story about the positive affects of the monoclonal antibodies. She then discussed the skepticism of African

Americans in receiving with medical treatment. Romelia concluded by urging that mask-wearing must be implemented once again, which is proven to reduce the spread.

Secretary Crouch stated that it is unfortunate that some have become numb to the virus, noting that the 1918 pandemic lasted two years. He explained that it is not always easy to make sure that the public is protected.

Dr. Amjad offered assistance and to answer any questions for Romelia Hodges.

Chairperson Upson asked if there is a limited supply of the monoclonal antibodies and why doctors do not just prescribe the antibodies.

Dr. Amjad explained that it could be that some physicians are not comfortable prescribing it. It is a standing order that a physician does not need to prescribe the order for the antibodies. Also, limited staffing to infuse the patients has been a barrier to receiving the antibodies.

Owens Brown stated that this is a threat which can destabilize our society.

Mike Jones asked if unclarity on the timing of receiving the booster after the second dose could be attributed to the slow response by African Americans.

Dr. Arnaez stated that it is possible that it could be late adoption, people waiting for their 4 to 6-week dose. He stated that he will keep an eye on the data for the one-dose. Dr. Arnaez stated that a little over a third of West Virginia's black population will have been vaccinated according to this at this point.

Mike Jones stated that he misunderstood, thinking that the discussion was about the booster shot.

Dr. Arnaez explained that it was the second dose and considered fully vaccinated.

Chairperson Upson shared the update on behalf of Reverend Patterson. He is hiring an additional health care worker and doubling efforts in expectancy of the uptick in vaccinations over the next month. In addition, Reverend Patterson wanted to thank Secretary Crouch for helping with the recordings at the Culture Center.

The Chair apologized for running over and, with no questions or comments raised, concluded the meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 8:47 a.m.