

HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES – June 2, 2022

Virtual meeting conducted via Zoom

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Steve Simon (Chair), Tanya Bonner, Katherine Diaz, Sara Fisher, Osi Kaminer, Jay Mazur,

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT: Wendy Pena.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Mary Anderson, Emily Marte.

GUESTS: Capt. Suchingh Singh, EMS Station 13; Dr. Fernando Taveras, Dr. Rodney Campos, and Hawa Jalloh, MIH Experience Ltd.; Pauline Ferrante and Juanita Rodriguez, NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene; Annika Sweetland, Jahneille Edwards, and Belkis Poche, Columbia University Irving Medical Center; Diane Ashley, MJHS Health System; Nicholas Arture, NY State Nurses Assn.; Dave Crenshaw, National Black Leadership Commission on Health; Nina Bernstein; Keltha McAulay; Patricia McMaster; Cheryl Miller; Christopher Smith.

S. Simon, chair, took attendance, noted the presence of a quorum, and called the meeting to order at 6:40 p.m.

- **EMS Services in Washington Heights-Inwood --** Captain Suchingh Singh, EMS Station 13, reported as follows:

- She has been the head of Station 13, Amsterdam Avenue and W. 172nd Street, for two months.
- 750 calls in the last week of May – 314 were high-priority calls
- Response time – 6.17 minutes – slower than the citywide average
- Getting more and more calls, increases during the summer
- In April, 1,440 calls in the morning, 1,172 in the afternoon
- Turnaround times at NYP emergency rooms in the last week of May (5/22-5/28): at Allen Hospital, 39.3 minutes; at 168th Street, 37.51 minutes. One reason for the delay: they take EKGs while patients are still on the EMS stretcher.

S. Fisher: How is the staff turnover?

Capt. Singh: We just got 10 new EMTs

S. Simon: The turnover times are getting worse, not better, since we last discussed this issue with NYP. We were told the turnover times would improve after the ER was renovated several years ago. We need to discuss this with NYP again.

- **CUIMC/NY State Psychiatric Institute Mental Wellness Equity Center –** Annika Sweetland, DrPH, MSW, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Public Health; Department of Psychiatry, Columbia Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons; Division of Translational Epidemiology, NY State Psychiatric Institute, and Department of Sociomedical Sciences, Columbia Mailman School of Public Health, is the training director. She gave a PPT presentation:

- The program will have four components – training, services, research, and education
- Developing an app, Mental and Financial Wellness Everywhere Digital Platform, for moderate/mild stress cases
- The goal is to create a community mental wellness workforce for screening, brief intervention, and interpersonal peer counseling; improve access to care and quality of care; will reduce waiting lists by pulling people off who don't need specialized care, a lower level of intervention
- Workers will receive intensive training and weekly supervision by licensed professionals; they will be certified after 6 months; in full-time jobs.
- Will be funded by state and city for the first two years; Rep. Espaillat obtained a federal grant (\$750,000)
- Hope to get reimbursed through Medicaid.
- Working with community groups such as ACDP and churches

There was a lengthy discussion about this program and whether it meets the need for additional mental health services in the community, both inpatient and outpatient.

- **Presentation on Proposed Overdose Stabilization Center --** Fernando Taveras, MD, Founder, and Director, MIH Experience Ltd., 4580 Broadway, spoke about his plan to open a drug and alcohol treatment facility at 659 W. 179th St.:

- MIH Experience is an outpatient service mostly serving WH-I residents
- He also has a psychiatric practice at Centro Medico Dominicano on W. 185th Street
- The stabilization center would offer detox and rehab services; would have 42 beds and be located in a building that he owns near the GWB Bus Terminal between Broadway and Wadsworth Avenue.
- It would serve a wide range of ages – “I’ve never seen so many young men and women using alcohol.”
- “We don’t have an in-patient service for the Spanish-speaking population...not at the level we require.”

His assistant, Hawa Jalloh, continued the presentation:

- “More people are dying from drug overdoses than COVID” because of fentanyl
- Washington Heights ranks around 50% for overdose deaths

- The program would use a holistic approach; would include methadone maintenance but not for everyone
- Would not be funded by the government, services would be billed to insurance companies

T. Bonner: We need more inpatient facilities and more resources. The program should be for everyone in the community.

H. Jalloh: We're not targeting any particular group, race, or religion. The only criteria are substance abuse disorder as the primary diagnosis.

F. Taveras: Our outpatient program serves different races and religions.

Dr. Rodney Campos, the outpatient program director (My Hope 2020), said that 80% of patients are Latino, 15% African American, 5% White, and Asian. "Everyone feels at home. We don't call them addicts; they have substance abuse issues. We want to expand the concept of treating humans as humans."

F. Taveras: The building will be leased to MIH Experience; he will retain ownership.

The committee urged them to work with the CORNER Project since they will be located only a few blocks apart.

R. Campos: Have had problems working with CORNER Project. They wouldn't let us leave business cards, and didn't return emails.

K. Diaz commended them for coming to CB 12 before applying for OASAS approval. She is familiar with the outpatient program and has referred people with alcohol and cocaine problems there. She urged them to reach out to people in the immediate area to explain the services that would be provided.

O. Kaminer requested stats on zip codes and blocks where patients come from.

Updates on the COVID-19 Pandemic in Our Community

- **COVID-19 Statistics for Washington Heights-Inwood** – S. Simon: Positivity rates for the seven days ending 5/30 were about 50% higher than when we last met a month ago: 7.68% in 10032, 8.19% in 10033 and 10034, 7.93% in 10040. There were 287 new cases, 60% higher than a month ago. Our transmission rate was about 50% higher than last month – 202.4 new cases per 100,000 people over the 7 days – but much lower than the citywide and Manhattan rates. Total cases in our community since the start of the pandemic: 50,406 – 1,926 more than last month. Total deaths from COVID-19: 923 – 1 more than last month. Vaccination rates for one dose range from 77.31% in 10034 to 81.83% in 10032. The rates for fully vaccinated range from 69.95% in 10034 to 73.19% in 10032. We lag behind the rest of the city (87% and 79%) and Manhattan (97% and 84%).
- **NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene** – Pauline Ferrante, Manhattan Community Liaison, reported that the city is now at high alert for transmission and that the 5-11 age group can now receive booster shots.
 - J. Mazur: There is a huge discrepancy between the official statistics and the actual infection rates because of the prevalence of home testing. 22% of the city's population got COVID in two weeks, not reflected in the stats.
 - P. Ferrante: You are not required to report to DOHMH if you test positive.
 - O. Kaminer said she texted Dave Crenshaw to find out where vaccines were being provided on Sunday, 5/22. Only nine people went to the Health & Hospitals bus on W. 207th Street to get vaccinated that day. The bus should move around to other blocks.
 - T. Bonner: The number of people infected will get worse if there are large gatherings and parties this summer.
 - S. Fisher: Are you advertising treatment options?
 - P. Ferrante: Treatment is not a substitute for vaccines. We're sharing info with pharmacies. I will check on the public health campaign.
 - P. Ferrante: no update on when the exterior work will be done at the District Health Center on W. 168th Street.
- **NY-Presbyterian Hospital** -- Julio Batista, Community Affairs Liaison, notified the chair that he had to attend the People's Theater Project fundraiser. He sent the following report:
 - NYP has 273 COVID patients system-wide; 35 in an ICU
 - In Northern Manhattan (Milstein/Allen Hospitals): 71 COVID patients, 8 patients in the ICU
 - Approximately half of these patients initially came to the hospital for other conditions and upon testing, it was discovered that they also had COVID.
 - Father's Day event w/ Council Member Carmen de la Rosa on 6/9 at Haven Plaza.
 - Telehealth Presentation with NYC Department for the Aging will go out to all senior centers on 6/14.
- **Columbia University Irving Medical Center** – Jahneille Edwards, Community Affairs Associate, said she will send her report tomorrow.

- **Isabella Geriatric Center** – Diane Ashley, Chief Marketing & Communications Officer, MJHS Health System, reported:
 - We are experiencing sporadic cases of COVID among residents and staff. Residents are isolated in a separate units.
 - Continuing to offer booster shots to residents and staff and promote vaccines to residents
 - All visitors must show proof of a negative test within 24v hours. We supervise self-administered tests for any visitors who need one.
 - Testing staff weekly
 - Thanked Mary Anderson for arranging for her to make a presentation to Aging Committee

- **Old Business** – S. Simon reported that there were 330 complaints to DEP by WH-I residents in May. Two of the top three complaints involved running hydrants (140 complaints combined). DDC reports that the gas main and water main replacement project in Washington Heights is substantially completed (99%) as of May 27. The contractor is working on the final punch list items. No report is available on street/sidewalk cleanliness ratings.
 - M. Anderson: heard that twice-a-week ASP parking is being reinstated in July.
 - S. Simon: don't believe that applies to our district since we have a once-a-week ASP.
 - O. Kaminer: We should invite Con Edison to discuss any plans they have for micro-grids in our community. Still concerned about the lack of textile recycling at the green market on Isham Street.
 - E. Marte: Are services still being provided to people who test positive for COVID, including food and hotels?

- **New Business** – The committee discussed where to hold a possible e-waste collection event. S. Fisher suggested that it should be held at the previous location outside Inwood Hill Park at Isham Street and Seaman Avenue, which proved to be very successful.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted, Steve Simon