

HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES – December 5, 2019

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Steve Simon (Chair), Tanya Bonner, Daryl Cochrane, Katherine Diaz, Sara Fisher, Elizabeth Lehmann, Rosy Perez.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT: Francisco Alvarez, Jay Mazur, Ayisha Olgivie (excused), Beatrice Hall (Public Member, Excused).

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC PRESENT: Julio Batista and Peter M. Gordon, M.D., NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital; Jorge Benitez and Jackie Wu, Columbia Research Unit.

The meeting was called to order at 7:21 p.m. S. Simon introduced the committee members and noted that two topics were removed from the agenda. 1) The Upper Manhattan Mental Health Center is still searching for a site for an outpatient substance abuse program in the CB 12 area, so is not ready to make a presentation. 2) The NY State Nurses Assn. met with NYP management and presented “potential solutions to the staffing problem” in the Labor & Delivery unit at the Allen Hospital and is waiting to hear back NYP’s response, so they asked that this item be postponed to the next meeting.

1. Annual update on HIV/AIDS services and programs in Washington Heights-Inwood (in observance of World AIDS Day) – Peter Gordon, M.D., Medical Director, Comprehensive HIV Infectious Disease Clinic, New York-Presbyterian Hospital, stated as follows:

- 1.4 million people have been affected by the AIDS epidemic in the U.S. since 1981; thousands have died
- Gov. Cuomo issued a “blueprint” in 2015 to end the epidemic in NY State by the end of 2020
- The goal is to get new infections down to 750 per year. 1600 new infections were reported in 2018, decreasing by 300 each year.
- Another goal is to get people tested. Only 7% of people with HIV are now unaware of their status
- People with an undetectable HIV viral load cannot transmit the virus
- Standard of care is to start as soon as people are diagnosed with HIV
- Very effective prevention method: take one pill a day – Truvada (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis or PrEP), provided free of charge. PrEP on Demand, taken before sex, is also effective, no side effects. 2nd drug, Descovy, has now been authorized by FDA.
- NYP is the second largest PrEP provider in NYC. His clinic has 2200 cases on an ongoing basis.
- NYP has received 13 different grants (federal, state, city and private) to provide HIV/AIDS services; working with various community groups. He said he would like to add them to the resource list on CB 12’s website.
- Next 24 months is the time to push for the end of the epidemic
- He would like to work with CB 12 to make this the first community board to eliminate the disease
- As part of its Community Service Plan, NYP has identified pockets of the community in need of HIV/AIDS services and is proposing to have a mobile medical unit bring the services directly to those neighborhoods
- 40% of people “who have fallen out of care in Washington Heights-Inwood and the South Bronx” stop taking medicine. They are generally drug abusers or people with other chronic illnesses
- “Bottom Up” program, a pilot project funded by the City Council – if they touch anywhere in the health care system, his program gets an alert and health navigators will visit them
- School-based health clinics provide PrEP in high schools. Parental consent not required; promotes sexual health access
- There are rising rates of HIV among young Latino and Asian men

S. Simon: The City announced this week that NYC has achieved the UN’s “90-90-90” goals for 9 in 10 people with HIV around the world to be diagnosed and treated. 90% of New Yorkers diagnosed with HIV are getting treatment, 93% of people with HIV know their status and 92% of those on treatment are “virally suppressed.”

2. HIV Biomedical Research -- Jorge Benitez, Community Engagement Coordinator, Columbia Research Unit, gave a PowerPoint presentation about HIV/AIDS and the work being done at the Medical Center to speed the development of a vaccine.

3. Isabella Geriatric Center Report – Betty Lehmann, Director of Marketing & Communications, reported as follows:

- Gov. Cuomo threat to cut Medicaid reimbursements to hospitals and nursing homes is not taking effect now; it’s been stayed by a federal judge. But it will come back in the spring as part of the state budget, which has a large deficit attributable to Medicaid. It will be a bad budget season for health care.

- Isabella is working with NYP/Allen Hospital to hold joint health outreach events in December. These events would normally be held at the Allen, but they need to be relocated because of construction there.

4. Washington Heights Workgroup on Syringe Litter and Drug Use – T. Bonner reported that The Corner Project is still trying to find a permanent space. The focus at the last meeting was on other community groups and the need to deal with the homeless issue. They discussed doing a referral service guide and that there is a rise in the use of crystal meth.

5. Old Business – S. Simon reported on the following:

- The Dept. of Sanitation has issued 18,523 summonses in our district this year as of 11/17/19. The largest number of summonses were for parking violations (10,073), failure to clean 18" into the street (2,943) and sidewalk obstruction (1,172).
- Street and Sidewalk Cleanliness Ratings: The ratings for acceptably clean streets in our district were 96% in October and 91.7% in September. The ratings for acceptably clean sidewalks were 100% in both October and September.
- There were 184 service requests to DEP in November. The highest number of complaints was for Noise: Construction Before/After Hours (26), followed by Lead Kit Requests (20). Since the DEP stats do not include complaints about late-night noise from bars/restaurants, it was agreed that we should ask the Public Safety Committee to find out the stats on those noise complaints, which are referred to NYPD.
- DDC provided a written status report on its four current projects in our district:
 - installation of sewer/water main in Inwood – 51% complete
 - installation of water main/fire hydrant/water valve replacements on Edgecombe Avenue bet. W. 165th St. – W. 170th St., Jumel Place bet. Edgecombe Ave. and W. 167th St., W. 166th St. & W. 167th St. bet. Edgecombe & Amsterdam Aves. -- 79% complete
 - water main/fire hydrant/water valve replacements on Haven Avenue, Fort Washington Avenue, Riverside Drive, W. 165th – W. 172nd Streets – 80% complete
 - water main/gas main replacement on Wadsworth Ave. from W. 183rd St. – W. 190th St., W. 184th – W. 186th Sts. from Broadway to St. Nicholas Ave. – 17.28% complete

6. New Business:

- There was a report in the press that all 11 detox units in NYC-run hospitals are being closed. It was agreed that we should invite someone to discuss this matter at our January meeting.
- K. Diaz: WEACT should be invited to a future meeting to discuss the plan it is working on regarding climate change in our community. She attended the meeting it held the other night at Holyrood Church. There were a lot of young people there. They discussed the need for cooling centers.

7. Announcements

- S. Fisher: Wh-Inwood Food Council is holding a workshop on eco-friendly gifts 122/12.

8. Next Meeting – A consensus agreed that the next meeting should be held on Jan. 9 instead of Jan. 2 because several members will be away that week.

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

Respectfully submitted, Steve Simon