

Senior Issues Committee Meeting February 2nd, 2021 – Minutes

In Attendance: Anthony Fletcher – Co-Chair; Martin Wallace, Co-Chair;
Walter Alexander – Member

Absent – Marti Cummings – Member

Others in attendance: Ameena Muhammad; Iretha Fletcher; Cora Gilmore; Ann Burley; Lorraine Wilbourne; Bessie Davis; Gail Powell; Celia Carbone – Columbia U. Grad Student; Gretchen Connelie – resident; Shirley Saxton – Social Security; Verna Arthur - DFTA; Ana Garcia – NY Presb.; Zead Ramadan – WHDC; Heather Caines – George Bruce Library; Chris Nickell – Senator Jackson’s Office; Dr. Teresa Mack – Presenter

Meeting called to Order at 11:13 AM

Agenda amended to reflect that Dr. Mack presents on Virus and Vaccine and Ana Garcia handles Q & A on behalf of NYP regarding their vaccine program at the Armory

Meeting Minutes adopted.

Reports:

Verna Arthur – DFTA

Reminder that there are COVID-19 scammers requesting personal information – be careful
Scam # 800-771-7775 or 311

All interested can subscribe for DFTA monthly newsletter – contact DFTA to sign up – see attachment of Chat from zoom call

Elected Reps –

Chris Nickell from Sen. Jackson’s Office

Any tenants facing hardship/legal action – statewide eviction moratorium until May 1st. See chat for form to fill out and submit.

Senior wellness checks – Phone bank with script. Anyone can sign up to help make calls
1500 seniors on CB9 list

Anthony – Are you are permanent rep?

Chris – next month joining with Caridad Figueroa – new liaison for CB9

Anthony – can small businesses take advantage of eviction moratorium?

Chris – No; but senate passed a bill last week that extends existing commercial eviction moratorium. Hoping Assembly will pass this bill soon.

Presentation from Dr. Theresa Mack – Bio Attached

Presents information on COVID, why it’s dangerous, how healthcare disparities have been revealed by virus, and clarify confusion and debunk myths about virus, provide questions to ask your doctor.

Severe acute respiratory syndrome. Can be mild, severe or cause death. Spread through respiratory droplets. Can land in mouth or nose of nearby people. Can be inhaled into lungs between people in close contact – less than 6 feet apart.

Two tests: Nasal swab for current infection
Antibody test – blood test: for past infection

Symptoms – cough; fever; difficulty breathing; loss of taste/smell; dizziness.

Racial differences – African Americans and Latinx have 2 ½ times higher rate of getting covid than whites. 5 times higher hospitalization rates.

Low vitamin D rates may play a role in difference between the races.

Pregnant women at increased risk of severe covid illness. Risk increases with age. Older adult at highest risk.

Severe illness means someone needs to be hospitalized, be in ICU, or be on ventilator.
If you are between 50 and 64 years old – have 4x higher risk of being hospitalized compared to 18-29 year-old person. Death rates are 30x higher. Rates increase as age goes higher.

Dr. Mack's office recommends remote access to work for patients because of risk if exposed at work.

Myths debunked:

Contrary to myths, no safety issues for vaccines other than allergic reactions.

Hydroxychloroquine not effective treatment

Masks DO help. Wear a mask!

Covid-19 is definitely worse than the flu – 400,000 deaths in the US and growing. Last year, flu caused a little over 60,000 deaths.

No evidence that COVID was created in lab in China

How to protect yourself –

- Avoid close contact with others
- Wash hands frequently
- Wear gloves but change frequently
- Practice social distancing
- Wear a mask! – cover nose and mouth

- Get the regular flu vaccine

Mask stats:

Person with Covid without mask comes in contact with healthy person with mask – transmission is 70%

Carrier wears mask and healthy person doesn't – transmission rate = 5%

Both wear mask – transmission rate = 1.5%

Question to ask your doctor:

Go to CDC and NY Health dept websites to get advice.

If you need to go to an emergency room – GO! Ask doctor for 30-90 day supply of medications. Do not delay getting emergency care. Hospitals have compartmentalized things to make going there safer.

Gail Powell:

Cover nose and mouth – what about your eyes?

Also – worried about being exposed - went to bathroom out in lobby – distressing

Dr. Mack

Difference between elective procedure vs. heart attack/other emergency.

Tear ducts – 6 feet social distancing takes this into account. Face shield if closer

Verna Arthur – Dentist did not use face shield – I gave him a shield, he would not wear it.

Dr. Mack – May need to consider finding a different dentist.

Anthony – Various vaccines will become available versus currently available – are there differences in terms of allergic reactions, etc.? Are any future vaccines more promising?

Dr. Mack – Current vaccines require two shots. None of the vaccines on the horizon have the actual virus – they have a protein to prepare body with antibodies. If you get covid, antibodies will recognize virus and kill it. Current vaccines are messenger RNA vaccines which stay in the cell but not in the nucleus with genetic info. Some medications can go into DNA and change its function. One new vaccine is only one injection by Johnson and Johnson. 60-70% effective, safe. Noticed that hospitalizations and deaths during trials were prevented much more than someone who did not receive vaccine. Can have fever and aches and pains if you have allergic reaction. Some vaccines cause temporary Bell's Palsy – facial paralysis – happened in both placebo and vaccine group. Vulnerable people may need to avoid vaccines.

It's a choice. You have the information. Vaccine is to prevent severe illness and death. However, if you stay home and avoid people, maybe you don't need the vaccine. That's understandable. Two choices – vaccine or virus. Either way, you protect yourself. Many are hoping for herd immunity, which would eliminate need for vulnerable people to be afraid.

Anthony – For seniors who are likely to need more medical attention, is it safe to go to the hospital or go to Dr.'s office at this time?

Dr. Mack – Our clinic will not treat people who are sick with COVID. We turn them away. Dr.'s offices follow Dept. of Health rules. Only 5 people allowed in waiting room. Once you are in exam room we do everything there. Vital signs, see Dr., appts. Reduce time around others. Follow up via video or phone. NO Covid testing at Dr.'s office. Any Dr's office that does testing has larger facilities and can separate patients better.

Ann Burley – Not sure if I've had it. Do I need to have the vaccine even if I've had the virus?

Dr.Mack - If you have had COVID and had antibodies, we are still recommending that people get the vaccine since we don't know how long antibodies last.

Ana Garcia – Q & A re. New York Presbyterian

Director of Govt. And Comm. Affairs at NYP. Here to talk about vaccinations at Armory 168th and Ft. Wash. NYP is a system of 10 hospitals – Weil Cornell and Columbia Presb. Included. Armory is next to Millstien Hosp.

In partnership with Governor and City, took over Armory to provide vaccinations to community. Started Jan 14th. If currently patient of NYP, over 65, probably got info through electronic health record or connect app. If not, can still make appt. by going to online site called vaccinetogetherny.org. To ensure that local residents, designated zip codes have guaranteed slots set aside. CB's 9,10,11,12 and areas of South Bronx. Working with local groups to help gain access of those who are unable to use internet.

Q&A:

Zead R.: Armory is in one of the most densely populated Latino communities in NY. What are you doing to reach into that community? Most people I know 65 and older in this community are immigrants and English challenged. App is not sufficient. Why not connect through the pharmacies? Any efforts to do that? I understand there wasn't much time to prepare, but what is being done?

Ana – Important to understand that supply of vaccines comes to hospitals from govt. We are now responsible for certain quantity and for delivering it. We were most quickly able to mobilize our own clients. Not connected to all pharmacies but working with major Community

Based Organizations (CBOs) like Mimic and Cloth to ask for help for referrals. Not set up that way as a hospital.

Zead – Follow Up – Had city created their own mechanisms, rollout would have gone to community. Seems like initial rollout benefited organizations, not local community, and govt. deserves to be criticized for this. Client based rollout is problematic. Need mechanism to ensure local community is served directly.

Anthony – don't shoot the messenger

Zead – just highlighting shortcomings of rollout. Done in chaos with little time to prepare. Not assuming they will do everything perfectly. Need to take these facts back to management and local leadership.

Ana – Our role is of a long-standing commitment to our patients. Committed to community health improvement. Began last March reaching out to all of our patients in transition to online care. Called thousands of people. Of course, everyone was not prepared on the day of the rollout. Spanish language access – we have translators on hand to help Spanish speakers. Vaccinators speak Spanish. Documents in Spanish and English. We are continuing to translate our materials into other languages as resources allow. Unfortunately, more complicated than Polio vaccination. Monitoring and second appointment involved.

Gail Powell – I got an e-mail last Thursday saying vaccine was available between 6-8 without appointment. Absurd – come at night, in cold, not sure how long the wait would be. I won't go out in cold at night. Was there a line?

Ana – I don't believe there was a line.

Martin – Communication inadequate for our seniors – most without internet. This conversation reveals the gaps that exist. DFTA communicates only with seniors who are members of seniors centers. Why aren't pharmacies being used more? Why aren't mass phone calls being made?

Zead – Need to review communication process.

Ana – we have lists of pharmacies also have collaboration with many pharmacies, just don't have infrastructure to ask them to do a blast to their patients.

Martin – Do you know what the barriers are to seniors in our community? Need to address these obstacles in order to improve rollout and prepare for future emergencies. This is the feedback.

Ana – We have been attempting to schedule appointments to reduce chances of long lines. Managing access, triangulating various factors. We will be happy to work with CB9 to improve this process.

Anthony – Better something than nothing. Let's come up with policy prescription to address problems.

Zead – Community boards should write to city to put pressure on city to open sites in our district.

Martin – Board Chair has done this and included proposed sites. Lack of refrigeration is cited as reason - mobile morgues could be retrofitted. How are you mitigating problem of dropped appointments due to inconsistent supply?

Ana – We won't make appointments for a first dose unless we know a second dose is available. Our methodology is 60% of all available appointments are for people in priority zip codes.

Zead – Reality is that NYP and Columbia are one of biggest employers in our community. This conversation is vital for Ms. Garcia to take back in order to address most vulnerable. Then help get city involved. Need to capture pockets in community that are missing vaccinations. Lastly, I thought calls at last moment were blessings in disguise – anyone getting vaccinated is a blessing. Lots of work to be done.

Anthony – Thank you Zead. Need to move agenda. Thanks to Ms. Garcia. Please come back to provide us with updates and connect with us regarding changes in policy or specific opportunities to get vaccinated.

Ana – Happy to keep reporting back and continue working with you. Offer to provide presentations about vaccine if anyone - tenant assoc./civic group – is interested. Martin, please forward.

Anthony – Old business – Budget hearing this month. Please attend. February 8th, 6:30 PM via Zoom. Shared information. Resources for Senior Centers, Meal Program, WiFi availability in community.

Iretha Fletcher – Testing site at Manhattan School for Music

Meeting Adjourns ca. 1:30

