



TM/SM

HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Serving Crowley & Otero Counties

Executive Director
Richard Ritter

Program Directors
Aaron Olivieri, Training
Tarren Buford, Nursing
Jo Jancar, WIC
John Miller, Business
Dr. Janell Maier, Epidemiology
Donna Starck, Tobacco Control
Su Korbitz, Environmental
Kristin Carpenter, Communities That Care
Arlene Cooke, OD2A

La Junta Office
13 West 3rd Street, Room 111
La Junta, CO 81050
Phone: (719) 383-3040

Rocky Ford Office
811 South 13th Street
Rocky Ford, CO 81067
Phone: (719) 254-5300

Ordway Office
603 Main, Courthouse Annex
Ordway, CO 81063
Phone: (719) 267-5247

Website: www.oterogov.com

OTERO COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH MEETING

MAY 25th, 2021, 11:00 a.m.

OTERO COUNTY COURTHOUSE

ROOM 107, LA JUNTA

Members Present: Dr. Paul Yoder, President and Medical Officer
Dr. R.J. Nelson, Vice President
Dr. David Trujillo
Nathan Shultz

Member(s) Absent: None

Ex Officio: Richard Ritter, BOH Secretary, OCHD Executive Director
John Hostetler, Otero County Commissioner
Amy White-Tanabe, Otero County Administrator

OCHD Staff: Tarren Buford, Nursing Program Director
Kristin Carpenter, CTC Program Director
Chris Coffield, RHC
Palmer Jones, OCHD Intern
Su Korbitz, Environmental Services Program Director
Dr. Janell Maier, Regional Epidemiologist
John Miller, Business Manager
Aaron Olivieri, EPR Trainer
Donna Starck, Tobacco Control Program Director

MINUTES

1. Call to Order: A quorum being present, the meeting was called to order by P. Yoder.
2. Public Notice Posting (Pursuant to C.R.S. 25-1-509(2)(f) & C.R.S. 24-6-402 (2)(c)): This agenda was posted in the designated public locations on 5/24/2021.
3. Public Comment: There were no public comments for items not on the agenda.
4. Consent Agenda (ACTION ITEM)
 - A. Approval of Minutes
 - a. March 30th, 2021 Regular BOH Meeting
 - B. Approval of Consent Agenda and Approval/Ratification of Items Therein: N. Shultz moved to approve the consent agenda and ratify the items therein, R. Nelson seconded, motion carried.
5. Old Business
 - A. None
6. New Business
 - A. Budget (Pursuant to C.R.S. 25-1-508 (5)(k) & C.R.S. 25-1-511 (3))
 - a. Financial Summary Report (based on Tyler Financial System Reports dated 5/21/2021)
 - March 2021
 - ✓ Revenues: \$22,854.88
 - ✓ Expenditures: \$111,350.48
 - ✓ Deficit: \$88,495.60
 - ✓ Fund Balance: \$1,463,096.74
 - April 2021
 - ✓ Revenues: \$133,195.11
 - ✓ Expenditures: \$130,962.82
 - ✓ Surplus: \$2,232.29
 - ✓ Fund Balance: \$1,465,329.03
 - b. Approval of Expenditures (ACTION ITEM) (based on Tyler Financial System Reports dated 5/21/2021): R. Nelson moved to approve the expenditures as detailed below, D. Trujillo seconded, motion carried.
 - March 2021: \$111,350.48
 - April 2021: \$130,962.82
 - B. COVID-19, a 14 Month Retrospective: For OCHD, COVID-19 response began in earnest on March 10th, 2020 when R. Ritter received a call from OCHD's regional epidemiologist, Dr. Maier, informing him that a traveler very recently came through La Junta and after they left Colorado this person tested positive for COVID-19. Then the floodgates opened, as an unrelenting onslaught of calls, emails, and texts ensued for many months. This onslaught continued into the evenings and weekends. At this point, OCHD began operating under the National Incident Management System (NIMS), to give structure and bring organization to the response.

While the information that follows below will shed light on the numerous negative aspects of the past 14 months, it must be noted that there are many, many people that appreciate the hard work of OCHD. Thank you cards, emails, and phone calls; gift certificates; and “goodie baskets” of food/treats have graciously and generously been provided to OCHD staff. Partners unhesitatingly rushed to our side to assist and support OCHD’s efforts. These partners included, but are not limited to, the following: Southeast Health Group (SHG), City of Rocky Ford/Public Safety, Rocky Ford Police Department, Otero Sheriff’s Department, Otero College, Crowley/Otero Emergency Management, Amy White-Tanabe, Michelle “Elle” Child, Med-Trans, Arkansas Valley Regional Medical Center (AVRMC), Crowley/Otero Commissioners’ Offices, medical providers and pharmacies, Otero Road & Bridge, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE), and many others. OCHD staff are to be sincerely commended for their patience, perseverance, positive interpersonal skills, professionalism, and performance during this unprecedented, difficult time.

During the majority of the year 2020, Coloradoans were under state executive and public health orders to close/alter business operations, stay at home (including student virtual classrooms), reduce the workforce, socially distance, wear face coverings, limit contact as much as possible, etc. OCHD’s numerous, varied COVID-19 response duties during this time included, but is certainly not limited to, the following: Contact investigation and tracing, isolation and quarantine of appropriate individuals; planning and preparing for an Alternate Care Facility (ACF); altering normal business operations to accommodate response; securing and then supplying medical providers with personal protective equipment when their supply was running low; answering a myriad of phone calls/emails/texts from the public, medical providers, elected officials, schools, government entities, private businesses, etc.; receiving, storing, accounting for, and distributing vaccine; directly providing vaccinations; providing and coordinating testing; disseminating and explaining executive and public health orders; working with businesses, churches, schools, the courts, event planners, medical providers, etc. to understand and implement numerous and complex executive and public health orders; and follow up on complaints regarding violations of public health orders.

Just to give a sense of how numerous and complicated the state public health orders/executive orders were, on 7/28/2020 an index of the state orders was published that was 15 pages long. It’s important to note that during the entire pandemic, OCHD has not issued any local public health orders more restrictive than the state.

For approximately 14 long, strenuous months, Local Public Health Agencies (LPHA) have been battling this damnable pandemic during the weekdays and on the weekends. Unfortunately this battle not only involved COVID-19 virus, but numerous and varied complaints, objections, threats to jobs, threats of physical violence, death threats, threats of lawsuits, intimidation, derision, scorn, disrespect, etc. directed at public health workers, including OCHD staff.

Throughout Colorado and across the U.S. there have been instances of local public health officials facing threats and vandalism. Instances in Colorado have included vandalized cars, poisoned dogs, a photograph with comments about “bodies swinging from trees,” and the arrest of a man who said health officials “deserve to pay.” There have also been several incidences of personal addresses of these public health workers shared through social media and protests at the private residences of local public health directors. For example, 9News reported in December 2020 that a group in a metro county “published name and home addresses of public health employees online with veiled threats of retribution for COVID-19 restrictions”. The threats to Colorado public health workers became so bad that state-level legislation had to be passed to protect them. HB21-1107, entitled “Protections For Public Health Department Workers” was signed into law on 5/18/2021. This law protects the personal information of public health workers and their families, providing them the same personal information protections that currently exist for law enforcement officers and human service workers. Violation of the prohibition on sharing of personal information is a class 1 misdemeanor.

Unfortunately, the threats of violence were not just restricted to public health workers, but also to businesses that were complying with public health orders. Locally, there has been at least 1 instance of an individual displaying a pistol to a business employee when the employee simply asked them to put on a mask. This behavior unfortunately has been documented nationwide, and led the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to publishing an online document entitled “Limiting Workplace Violence Associated with COVID-19 Prevention Policies in Retail and Services Businesses.”

As is the case in any battle, there are casualties, and it has extracted a significant toll in terms of physical and mental health. After polling local public health directors across the state, the Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials (CALPHO) found about 80% said they or their personal property had been threatened since the pandemic began. Nineteen of the 54 local public health agencies have had directors who have left their positions or plan to do so in the near future.

In the southeast region alone, we have lost 50% of our public health directors due to resignation during this time, and OCHD also lost an essential and valued staff member to resignation. R. Ritter has been in his current position since August 2000, and out of all the numerous, varied challenges he has faced during a 2 decade tenure, the COVID-19 pandemic has been the challenge of his career as a public health practitioner. It has been unbelievable.

There is an old saying, “those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it.” This story must be told and remembered, because there will be another pandemic. Dr. Tom Frieden, former Director of the CDC, has said “But the sad truth is that pandemics even deadlier than Covid could happen at any point in the future.” We need to apply lessons learned during COVID-19 to the pandemic that is coming so that when a future, deadly contagion rears its ugly head, we will have a well-supported public health workforce in place to protect the public’s health.

C. Addendum/Addenda

- a. Rick Ritter Commendation: The BOH commended R. Ritter for his COVID-19 response performance, and sent said commendation in the form of a letter to the Otero County Commissioners.

7. Program Reports

- A. Nursing, Tarren Buford: General information
 - B. CTC, Kristin Carpenter: General information
 - C. RHC, Chris Coffield: General information
 - D. Environmental Services, Su Korbitz: General information
 - E. DCEP, Dr. Janell Maier: General information
 - F. Vital Statistics, John Miller: General information
 - G. Public Health Training, Aaron Olivieri: General information
 - H. EPR, Rick Ritter: General information
 - I. WIC, Rick Ritter: General information
 - J. Tobacco Control, Donna Starck: General information
8. Executive Session: Not requested nor required.
9. Adjournment: With no further business, P. Yoder adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,



Richard Ritter
Secretary, Otero County Board of Health
Executive Director, Otero County Health Department