



Onondaga County Legislature

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HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE MINUTES – NOVEMBER 17, 2021 JULIE ABBOTT, CHAIR

MEMBERS PRESENT: Dr. Chase, Ms. Cody, Mr. Bush, Mr. Kinne

ALSO ATTENDING: Mr. Knapp; also see attached

Chair Abbott called the meeting to order at 10:36 a.m. *A motion was made by Dr. Chase, seconded by Mr. Kinne to waive the reading and approve the minutes of the previous committee meeting. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED. A motion was made by Dr. Chase, seconded by Mr. Kinne to approve the previous committee meeting minutes. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED*

1. **HEALTH DEPARTMENT:** Dr. Indu Gupta, Commissioner

a. **A Local Law Relating to Certain Fees Collected by the Onondaga County Health Department and the Center for Forensic Sciences for Medical Examiner and Forensic Laboratory Services, and Further Amending Local Law No. 5-2019**

- Increase in fees; more revenue to offset local dollars – due to increase in staff salary, things purchased, cost of living, service charges in doctor's offices; same principal the department continues to apply
- Last year did not increase, this year changes are reflected in different services provided; autopsies, examinations, special cases, etc.; increment is 3% - clinical services and disease control; also looking at an increase
- If someone comes to clinic and cannot afford, will not send them to collections or not provide service, try to get as much revenue possible
- In terms of Medical Examiner, serving Oneida as their Medical Examiner; calculation based on how much percentage of staff time is done by Medical Examiner
- Provide Medical Examiner top seed, will be charged for this
- If have to testify, they will be charged a certain amount; want to continue work without burdening tax payers

Chair Abbott asked if 3% is across the board. Dr. Gupta replied:

- 3% for Medical Examiners, one overall; 2% for Toxicology, other 3%, for clinical services there is an increase 6-13%
- Insurance pays whatever they pay; if someone is charging \$180, insurance will pay \$60, take that and write off difference
- Make sure not a burden to the patient; there are ways of finding a balance

Dr. Chase asked what they mean by the fee for private autopsy shall be removed. Ms. Mignano replied that the fee was on the fee schedule for 20 plus years. At that time, it used to be capacity for individuals to request their own additional autopsy for litigation purposes. The MEO does not have the capacity to do anything other than the autopsies and medical legal requirements that the county needs and contracts for. If they had the capacity, they would bring it back, but they did not want to have it out there as a standard.

Dr. Chase stated, it is not just the fee being eliminated, but also the service. Dr. Gupta replied:

- Medical Examiner's office investigates any deaths which have question of criminality
- Private autopsies are done by hospitals or private pathologists; it was not being done as part of the practice because of the need for autopsies to investigate; sometimes physicians confer to sign death certificate that was unexpected
- i.e. A family might want private autopsy on someone with underlying conditions; have to ask the patient if they are

considering autopsy; expect no; if they do, with no criminality, staff assesses this; no issues or concern, physician will sign death certificate; creates some confusion

- This is a not a private autopsy place, this is where the county provides services for public health and law enforcement for any investigation; that is the difference

Dr. Chase asked if there is still a private autopsy. Dr. Gupta replied no, because it is not warranted. Why would a publicly funded Medical Examiner's Office do an autopsy? Not privately funded. No charges go out to the family. If there is no wrong doing, the physician is ok to sign. If an autopsy is needed, the hospital can do that. Dr. Chase asked if the policy is clear that there would never be a private autopsy, or is it based on a situation. Dr. Gupta responded that she would follow up with Dr. Revercomb, but that is the policy.

Mr. Bush asked if these are the fees the county charges other counties. Dr. Gupta said that is correct. Mr. Bush asked if Oneida County has other fee schedules. Dr. Gupta responded that Oneida gets charged what the workload is there from start to finish. Other counties are charged per case. Mr. Bush said Oneida County has a flat fee based on the work. Dr. Gupta said no. If they have half the work, they get charged half the work, etc. Mr. Bush asked if Dr. Gupta has checked with Cayuga and Oswego County to see if these fees are acceptable. Dr. Gupta replied no, these are Onondaga County's expenses, so this is what they can do. It is like a mini hospital, where they take care of the people who have passed away and find out the right cause of death. It is compared to being admitted to a hospital and getting a bill.

Mr. Bush said it seems like staffing is an issue and asked if they are concerned about the service area. Is the MEO able to take on the area they have taken on without additional Onondaga County taxpayer funds? Dr. Gupta said that is a great question. These are the things that make sure Onondaga County taxpayers are not paying extra for other counties. It will be a formal process in 2022, based on work capacity. Mr. Bush said based on the cost of pathologists, the costs are escalating. Dr. Gupta said yes and explained that they walked the path on what the services are from the time a person is discharged, to when they are at the funeral home. Every path calculated is based on staff time and salary. It is a pretty detailed cost calculation. Mr. Bush said that this office has the highest cost ratio to work load in any county department. Dr. Gupta commented that it is a required service for the County under the Health Department. Both the crime lab and Medical Examiner's Office are under the Health Department. She cannot comment on other county departments. Mr. Bush stated that residents are top priority in terms of their service. Dr. Gupta said yes, it is their first priority in the county.

Mr. Kinne asked if someone dies outside the county, then there is no one charged if there is an autopsy or homicide. Dr. Gupta replied right, there is zero charge. This is a required service to keep the community protected and help the public. No cost to the person if the case is accepted by the Medical Examiner's Office.

A motion was made by Dr. Chase, seconded by Mr. Kinne, to approve this item. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.

Chair Abbott asked about a survey on immunizations being offered for COVID to elementary school children. Dr. Gupta replied:

- Did a survey with schools and worked with superintendents; 9,500 parents responded in one week; 50% said they would get the immunization
- Question: who do you want to get the immunization from, and who do you trust?
- Answer: Family physician; 5-11 year olds was from family physician
- Question: where? 70% pedestrian, 50% school clinic, less than 30% was community base
- Message was conveyed to superintendents and pediatricians to get vaccine in their offices
- Working with multiple places, Kinney's and Wegmans (excellent partners)
- Took different schools, many scheduled; SCSD works with Wegmans, who is doing many schools including Liverpool, ESM, Onondaga Central, Jamesville Dewitt, Fayetteville Manlius; using Kinney's as well
- Opened clinic to 120-180 people and filled it
- Ages 5-11 cannot have a big setting; if one cries, all cry; clinic works well for this group, small setting

- Governor has opened more for the State Fair; pharmacies are doing their own; trying to educate them, multiple places to get vaccine; schools call to send their request, will schedule it; first come, first serve
- 30% did not show on Monday; parents did not bring children
- Do not occupy two places; asking people to cancel if they cannot attend

Chair Abbott stated that it is convenient for people and schools; it is having to get out of work. Dr. Gupta replied that it is convenient for other places; there are off hours. Fairgrounds has weekends and off hours. Dr. Gupta said they will have all hours as well, including weekends.

A motion was made by Mr. Bush, seconded by Ms. Cody, to adjourn the meeting. Passed unanimously; MOTION CARRIED.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:10 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



DEBBIE KAMINSKI, Assistant Clerk
Onondaga County Legislature

ATTENDANCE

COMMITTEE: **HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE**
DATE: **NOVEMBER 17, 2021**

| NAME (Please Print) | DEPARTMENT/AGENCY |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| Yvette Velasco | Law |
| Indu Gupta | OCHD Health |
| Michelle Mignozzi | OCHD |
| Steve Smol | Fin ops |
| Tenisha Murphy | CE Office |