

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
MEETING OF THE BOARD OF HEALTH

Thursday, July 9, 2019

The Philadelphia Board of Health held a public meeting on Thursday, July 9, 2019 in the Municipal Services Building, 1401 J.F.K. Boulevard, 14th Floor, Room 1450.

**Board Members Present:** Tyra Bryant-Stephens, MD; Ana Diez-Roux, MD, PhD, MPH, Thomas Farley, MD, MPH; Marla J. Gold, MD; Scott McNeal, DO; John Rich, MD, MPH.

**Attendees:** Dr. Jeffrey Hom, Lauren O'Malley, Vanessa Assibey-Mensah, Josh Roper, James Garrow.

### **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Health Commissioner and Board President Thomas A. Farley, MD, MPH called the meeting to order at 5:37 p.m. Dr. Farley asked for comments and questions about the minutes of the meeting of the Board of Health held on June 13, 2019.

Dr. Farley motioned to approve minutes. Motion seconded.

**Motion passed.**

### **OVERDOSE PREVENTION SITES**

Dr. Farley provided an overview of the opioids crisis and the City's response. He made mention of the 8% drop in overdose deaths in 2018 compared to 2017 but admitted this was still considered a "crisis level." Dr. Farley raised the idea of Overdose Prevention Sites as a possible response to the crisis and noted that both he and the Mayor of Philadelphia support the idea of an OPS opening in Philadelphia, even if the City cannot operate it for a variety of reasons. This meeting is being called to see if the Board of Health would adopt a public posture on this topic.

Dr. Jeffrey Hom of the Philadelphia Department of Public Health gave a presentation on the status of the opioid crisis in Philadelphia. Dr. Hom noted that of the more than 1,100 overdose deaths in 2017, opioids were found in the decedent's system more than 80% of time, with fentanyl being found in 80% of those cases. The deaths are found throughout Philadelphia, but certain hotspots are found in Kensington/Fairhill, South Philadelphia, and West Philadelphia. Dr. Hom noted that while white men, aged 35 to 54 are primarily affected, all demographic groups are experiencing deaths from this crisis. Dr. Hom described increases in HIV, Hepatitis C, and infectious endocarditis cases, and it is theorized that these rises are driven by the opioid crisis and injection drug use.

Dr. Hom then described the operations of OPS, and associated services that are typically made available at these sites. There are OPS in the United State, but Dr. Hom highlighted that there are

more than 100 OPS currently operating around the world, and research has shown that these sites save lives, reduce comorbid diseases, reduce public drug use and litter, reduce syringe sharing, and increase treatment. No overdose deaths have been recorded in any OPS thus far. Research has also shown no increase in crime in the area around Insight, the Vancouver OPS, that has been the center of much of the research in the field. Dr. Hom described a recent study by a Jefferson University researcher that estimated that opening one OPS in Kensington would save between 24 to 76 lives per year, in addition to 1 in 18 HIV cases, and 15 - 213 Hepatitis C cases could be prevented per year.

Dr. Hom provided information on SafeHouse, which is a local organization dedicated to opening an OPS in Philadelphia including their website. SafeHouse was being sued by the US Attorney to forestall opening an OPS, and Dr. Hom noted that he hoped the Board could provide support to SafeHouse via a resolution that could be submitted to the Court.

Dr. Hom presented draft resolution language for the Board to consider.

Dr. Farley opened the floor to questions from the Board.

## **DISCUSSION**

- **What are the hours of operation at the Insight facility and would those would be similar at the proposed SafeHouse site?**
  - Insight is open for about 16 hours per day, and SafeHouse would probably operate similarly.
- **Are drug treatment slots available in Philadelphia right now?**
  - There are open slots, and the City is working hard to get more open, especially due to the introduction of new treatment options that allow for less onerous treatment regimens like buprenorphine.
- **What did Dr. Hom mean when he said there were no sanctioned OPS operating in the United States?**
  - There are none that are city-supported or “above-ground,” however there is an “underground” OPS site that is currently operating in California, but researchers will not release where it is located.
- **What is the Health Department’s role in overseeing an OPS in Philadelphia?**
  - There is no official oversight mechanism in place, though SafeHouse has established an Advisory Committee to ensure the safety of the operations at the facility.
- **Can the resolution highlight that OPS is not the only response to the opioid crisis?**
  - OPS is just one of many things the City is doing in response and we can work to communicate that idea.
- **Can this effort to be used to push people into treatment?**
  - The City and SafeHouse have said from the beginning that the goal of this effort is to get more people into treatment.
- **Can more specific language about the full range of response be added to the resolution?**

- It could be added at the end, "... as part of a comprehensive strategy to address the opioid crisis in the city of Philadelphia..."
- **Does this open the Board to criticism about if the City's response is indeed comprehensive?**
  - Add a new Whereas that places the Mayor's Task Force as the inciting action of a comprehensive citywide response, that includes exploring the operation of an OPS as one part.

Dr. Farley motioned to approve the additional language. Motion seconded.

**Motion passed.**

Dr. Farley motioned to approve the resolution. Motion seconded.

**Motion passed.**

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Dr. Farley announced there was no new business on today's agenda.

The Board held a series of short conversations on a potential homicide death review committee; the PES refinery explosion, associated air monitoring, and future of the site; and the Health Department's role in the closure of Hahnemann University Hospital. Dr. Farley provided updates on each of these situations.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Dr. Farley adjourned the meeting at 6:31 p.m.