

Hospital bed shortage is no joke, PCPH says

New nutritionist position proposed

By Sarah Nigbor

According to Pierce County Public Health Director AZ Snyder at the Dec. 8 Board of Health meeting, western Wisconsin hospitals are full and it's a struggle to place patients in the Twin Cities. Rising numbers of COVID patients in need of hospitalization is cause for concern. "I can't emphasize enough what a serious situation this is as far as hospital capacity," Snyder said. "As of last week (the week of Dec. 1), we had less than 1% of ICU beds available and less than 1% of med-surg beds available in the Twin Cities."

Snyder's advice to combat the rising number of confirmed COVID cases is to get vaccinated. She said the county is seeing a lot of outbreaks in long-term care facilities, in vaccinated and unvaccinated people. However, she said, the vaccinated people's cases have been much milder. Since Jan. 1, 12.8% of positive COVID cases have been in fully vaccinated people.

As of Dec. 12, PCPH had confirmed 182 new COVID cases in the previous seven days.

"We are urging residents to continue to remain vigilant, to mask when they're in public, to stay home if they're sick, even if their symptoms are mild, and go get tested at one of our free testing sites."

PCPH distributed more than 900 vaccines in November and is on track to do the same in December, Snyder said. Staff can barely keep up with the booster clinics. They are trying to open up more appointment slots to accommodate demand, but more staff is needed.

Because of staffing issues, PCPH may not be

able to continue offering pediatric vaccine clinics, Snyder said.

"Three vaccine groups is too much," she said. "We'll really need to rely on pharmacies and health care providers."

The community testing site at Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services will be open 9-11 a.m. Dec. 27, Jan. 3 and Jan. 6. After those dates, the site will not reopen. The National Guard needs to be redeployed to help in healthcare and long-term care settings, Snyder explained, so not all community testing sites were approved for an extension.

As for vaccine supply, PCPH is "doing okay," Snyder said.

"You never know what's going to happen from week-to-week," she said.

Two weeks ago, PCPH had to borrow Moderna vaccines from Eau Claire and Barron. Pierce County's location near large health systems, such as Mayo and Gunderson, has helped out tremendously, as far as ability to borrow vaccine, Snyder shared.

Board members asked Snyder if PCPH is hosting COVID vaccine clinics at area schools. The answer is no. National data indicates parents prefer vaccinations to occur at the doctor's office, she said.

"I don't blame them," she admitted. "I would probably prefer that too, rather than a mass clinic."

However, PCPH has offered to host clinics at area schools, all of which have turned her down. Resistance to school-based vaccination clinics is not just COVID-based. The numbers for in-school flu vaccinations are way down this year, Snyder said. Rumors were circulating that PCPH would vaccinate children against COVID-19 and not the flu, which Snyder called preposterous.

"We heard that over and over and over again," Snyder said about people's flu vaccine hesitancy. "There are anti-vaccine groups in

Wisconsin that are sending letters directly to school administrators, telling them that if they hold clinics on school grounds, that they will be liable for anything that happens, which is simply not, in my understanding, the case."

Misinformation running rampant has discouraged people from getting flu or COVID vaccines, Snyder said.

New position request

The board voted to forward a request to Finance & Personnel Committee for a new nutrition and public health specialist position.

According to Snyder, the state informed PCPH on Aug. 9 that it will receive \$90,000 of workforce development funds and just under \$500,000 of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, which is health department-specific.

"This position is really designed to allow a strategic, sustainable and timely use of our preparedness money that we're receiving from the state," Snyder said.

The \$90,000 workforce development funds, which must be spent by June 2023, is to be used in recruiting, hiring and training personnel to address projected jurisdictional COVID-19 response needs, Snyder explained.

The position (40% of the time) would support COVID response acts through 2022 and 2023, while the rest of the time would be devoted to Women, Infants, Children (WIC) nutritionist work. The position would be fully funded by ARPA and the workforce development grants, with no tax levy support needed.

"Preliminary data has revealed that during the pandemic, American families' consumption of vegetables has decreased by 41%," Snyder said. "This points to additional nutrition support needed in the county."

Key responsibilities would include case investigation for positive COVID cases. Currently, the lead case investigator has 300-plus cases alone, Snyder said. It's also hard to retain contract staff to help with case investigation as many don't want to work full-time.

The new position would also assist Snyder and Brittany Mora with drafting, updating and

disbursing external communications such as news releases. In a typical year, PCPH issues 11 news releases, Snyder said. In 2020, more than 30 were issued.

The new hire would also support Pierce County families in recovering to a stronger nutritional status following the worst of the pandemic, and increase families' access to direct WIC resources.

PCPH had planned to add this position to its ranks before COVID hit, Snyder added, especially since PCPH took over Pepin County's WIC program. ARPA funds and WD grants will cover the position's salary 2022-24. After 2024, funds from a current WIC clerk position (which will be eliminated upon the current clerk's retirement) will be allocated to the second nutritionist position. This will be possible because WIC technology has reduced the level of clerical support needed.

"The biggest factor is WIC's transition," Mora said. "Moving toward spending money directly on nutritional and educational services."

This position is required by the state, Mora added. Also, counties are seeing increases in WIC, breast feeding and Fit Families funding. Fit Families is a program for families enrolled in WIC who want to make changes to be healthier.

Dunn County has two nutritionists, Snyder said, and their ability to help families is "amazing."

"This will play a huge role in alleviating stress and burnout in health department staff," Snyder said. "It would give us someone to depend on daily."

Staffing update

PCPH welcome Registered Nurse Cassie Butler to its ranks on Nov. 29, which Snyder called "a dream come true." Butler previously worked as the lead nurse for Prescott School District, at Mayo in Red Wing and for Sacred Heart.

Dianne H-Robinson, RN, will retire Jan. 28; one internal candidate is applying for the position.

BIG BUCK

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positive it was their elusive unicorn, but they had an inkling. The two decided to count 1, 2, 3 and shoot at the same time. Boom! Boom!

"It wasn't perfect," Hines laughed. "But it's something neither one of us will ever forget."

The duo's shots entered 1.5 inches apart and their exit holes created a perfect Figure 8, something they could never replicate in 100 years, Hines said. The buck dropped almost instantly.

"I think I was more excited than him," Hines said of McMurray.

The seventh grader may have been in shock. He said he didn't know the buck was The Buck, so he just focused on where he was shooting. After all, it was his first buck. Although he's been hunting since he was 8, he had shot does every year. And what a first buck to harvest. He said when he told his friends at school, they were proud of him. Plus, no one else had harvested a buck that size.

"I'd shot plenty of does, but no bucks," McMurray said.



PJ Hines (left) and Kaden McMurray show the rack of the 18-pointer they harvested Nov. 22 near Plum City. The nontypical buck Green Scored 179 5/8. Two points are broken off. Photo by Sarah Nigbor

Not five minutes before that, Hines daughter, 17-year-old Allysha, had harvested her own deer. She had a score to settle, as she had missed one on opening morning and was not too pleased. That buck had split brow tines and hooks, a clue that some "funky genetics" are at work, Hines said. When Hines and McMurray told their family they had finally harvested the nocturnal buck, no one believed them at first.

The prize nontypical buck had 16 intact points and Green-Scored 179 5/8. A shoulder mount will capture the story forever.

McMurray may never top this buck, but he's willing to try. He's planning to possibly try bow hunting next year. As for Hines, the buck is just the icing on the cake.

"I've raised him since he was 1," Hines said. "He's my hunting partner for life."

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MUDDY WATERS

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that I love so much and see it in the hands of someone else and see it change."

After Mann was diagnosed with cancer, he took Wormington's word and hoped he would take over Muddy Waters.

"After he got diagnosed, he told me we should sit down and talk and so we did and everything was going great for him for a long time," Mitch Wormington said. "About a year ago, he got a prognosis that led to us talking very seriously about me taking over for him."

The passion that went into what Muddy Waters is today really stemmed from the vision Mann and co-owner and partner Patti Schichel created.

"He loved this place, he never complained, and he was one of the hardest working men I've ever met in my life and I'm so thankful for him and Patti," Mitch Wormington said. "She is a chef, so she did all of the food and decor and Steve had a construction background and he had this vision and created this multi-level deck and he called it his 'Taj Mahal.'"

The ambiance and feel of Muddy Waters will remain, but Mitch Wormington hopes to return to some of Muddy's roots.

"There aren't going to be any major changes, but we used to have more live music and there was just more going on and we really want to bring that back this spring and sum-

mer," he said.

Mitch Wormington is looking forward to what the future holds for Muddy Waters alongside his business partner Christenson.

"He is the best match for me personality wise to do this and he has been here for a very long time," Mitch Wormington said. "He's been here for 14 years, and I actually trained him in as a bartender, and I've gotten to know him over the years, and we were both very close to Steve."

Mitch Wormington continues to praise Schichel and Mann for all the hard work they put into Muddy Waters.

"Eric, myself and my wife have so much respect and appreciation for Steve and Patti both and what they have created here and I miss him greatly and there isn't a day that goes by where I wish I could pick up the phone and talk to him," Mitch Wormington said. "He created this vision and I'm so honored to have this opportunity. He believed in me and so did Patti and we saw it through."

Muddy Waters is open daily at 11 a.m. and is open until 9:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday and until 8:30 p.m. Sunday through Thursday. They are also updating their social media pages and website. To learn more, visit muddywaters-barandgrill.biz and their Facebook page at Muddy Waters Bar and Grill.



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