

December 17, 2004

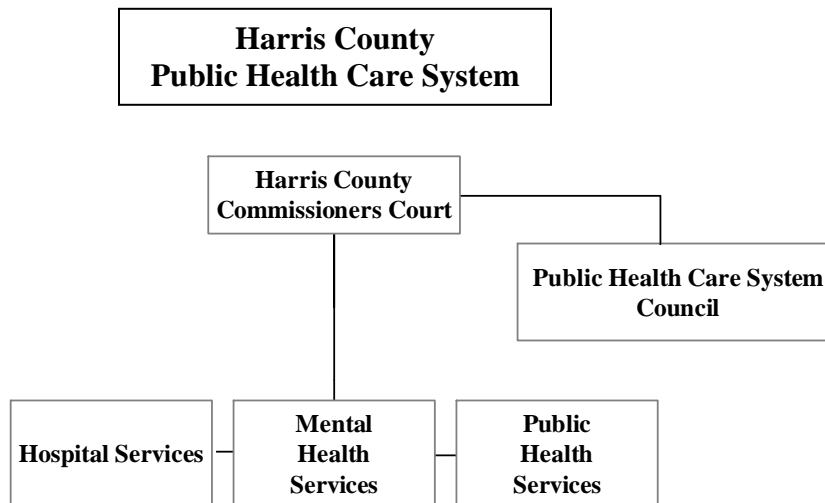
To: County Judge Eckels and
Commissioners Lee, Garcia,
Radack and Eversole

Fm: Public Health Delivery Study Group

Re: Harris County Public Health Care System

The court on September 14 directed that a review be made of studies of public health care by the Greater Houston Partnership and the Save Our ERs Coalition. The court asked that, following meetings with directors of the Hospital District, MHMRA, and Public Health, recommendations be prepared for an implementation plan that could be considered.

The following recommendations are made for a Harris County Public Health Care System.



Statement of Purpose: Harris County will seek to develop and maintain a comprehensive, coordinated, and evolving health care delivery system. The system should provide necessary population-based public health interventions and access to a network of preventive and primary care services with particular emphasis on care for persons who have little or no medical insurance coverage. The system should, on a continuing basis, provide available and responsive trauma and emergency care for persons who are in need of such services.

The Council. The council, a 21-member body, would advise the court and make recommendations for the envisioned comprehensive, coordinated public health care delivery system. A team of staff designated from the county, Hospital District, and MHMRA would provide initial administrative and research support for the council. That support would include contracts for outside consultant services when necessary. The council would appoint committees of professionals and community representatives to study subject areas, and those committees would also be supported by the designated staff.

A recommended list of council appointments is attached.

Hospitals. The Harris County Hospital District (HCHD) under the Board of Managers would provide hospital services, trauma and emergency services, and specialty and primary care clinics.

Mental Health. The Harris County Mental Health and Mental Retardation Authority (MHMRA) under its Board of Trustees would oversee and designate providers for mental health services.

Public Health. The Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services Department (HCPHES) would provide public health services in collaboration with the City of Houston's Health & Human Services Department (HHHS) pending merger of some or all functions.

The above agencies would establish a formal agreement for joint planning and cooperation to implement the public health care delivery system.

The Council, after consultation with the agencies, and with the assistance of designated staff, would submit to Commissioners Court proposed policies, actions, studies, and reports that would be necessary for the comprehensive, coordinated health care system. Included would be recommended priorities, timetables, projected funding requirements, and legislative proposals.

A list of 22 subject areas that, among others, would be considered by the Public Health Care System Council and the agencies are shown on the following two pages.

1. **Alternative futures.** Continued analyses and reports on population and demographic trends and identification of health care needs in the community; review and measurement of outcomes of current programs; and projection of alternative paths that could be taken to improve and maintain the health care system.
2. **Financial support.** Integrated, cooperative financial planning for grant, foundation, private, and non-profit funding sources for the varied services of the system, including funds for model projects to demonstrate ways to increase access to health care for the uninsured and working poor.
3. **Legislation.** Legislative proposals that should be considered to strengthen the capacity of and financial resources for the system, provide equitable distribution of state and federal funding, and expand access to care.
4. **Insurance.** Increased coverage for medical services for the uninsured and underinsured through a variety of public, private, employer-sponsored, and hybrid insurance programs.
5. **HCHD 2015 Plan.** Priorities and funding for the Hospital District's 2015 capital improvements plan for expansion of capacity for services, including collaborative use of facilities with MHMRA and Public Health where feasible.
6. **Psychiatric emergencies.** Merger of MHMRA and Hospital District psychiatric emergency services, expansion of emergency and mobile services to other parts of the county, and recommendations for improvements in related aspects of public mental health care, including use of beds at the Harris County Psychiatric Center and inpatient psychiatric beds of the Hospital District.
7. **Mental health services.** A comprehensive assessment of community mental health care and integration of services with the Hospital District's community clinics.
8. **Health merger.** Merger of some or all of the City of Houston's public health services with the county's Public Health & Environmental Services Department.
9. **Transfer of services.** Transfer of certain medical primary care services provided by the county's Public Health department to the Hospital District.
10. **Quad-Agency Group.** The Quad group, composed of the directors of HCHD, MHMRA, and city and county health departments, will continue to meet for cooperative planning and collaboration pending the outcome of feasibility reviews for service mergers and interlocal agreements.
11. **IT system and eligibility.** Provision of a coordinated information technology system that would facilitate development of the preventive and primary care services network with an integrated community-wide eligibility system.

12. **Community clinics.** Expansion of clinic services, including joint use of facilities where feasible; possible partnerships with private physicians and hospitals; applications for FQHC (Federally Qualified Health Center) and FQHC look-alike projects; wellness programs; and reduction in wait times for current clinics.
13. **Transportation.** Non-emergency transportation for safety-net patients to preventive and primary care clinics and specialty and urgent care centers.
14. **Pharmacy services.** Methods of providing medications at the lowest cost and establishment of new community-based points of access including retail outlets.
15. **Nurses and other staff.** Cooperative programs for recruitment and retention of nurses and other critical and professional support staff for the Public Health Care System.
16. **Homeless.** Opportunities for grant-funded projects to provide housing and health-related services for the homeless.
17. **Jail.** Improvements in medical and mental health care for jail inmates and continuity of care for those who are released to the community.
18. **Children's Care.** Coordination of medical services for children and juveniles in the county's custody.
19. **School-based clinics.** Collaboration with ISDs throughout the county for clinic services and health education and nutrition information programs.
20. **Call centers and web sites.** Development of appropriate and informative call center and referral operations and web sites for the public regarding the Public Health Care System and its services.
21. **Seniors and the disabled.** Cooperative planning for health-related and disease management services for senior citizens and the disabled who are without adequate financial resources.
22. **EMS.** Analysis of emergency medical services and the steps necessary to develop and maintain uniform standards and capabilities throughout the county, including improved responses for medical emergencies.

Attachments

- Proposed list of appointments for the Public Health Care System Council.
- Directive of Commissioners Court on 9/14/04.

Public Health Delivery Study Group

King Hillier, director, Harris County Office of Legislative Relations

Jim Lemond, Harris County Hospital District Board of Managers

David Lopez, HCHD interim president/CEO

Dr. Herminia Palacio, director, Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services

Dick Raycraft, Harris County Management Services & CBO

Dr. Steve Schnee, director, Harris County MHMRA