

## **Soldiers' Home in Holyoke Board of Trustees Meeting**

A meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke (HLY) was held telephonically on Thursday, April 16, 2020. The meeting began at 5:15 PM.

- **Members Present:**  
Kevin Jourdain, Chairman; Christopher Dupont, Cindy Lacoste, Cesar Lopez, Carmen Ostrander, Isaac Mass, Richard Girard.
  - **Also Present:**  
Daniel Tsai, Assistant Secretary, EOHHS, Val Liptak, Interim Superintendent, Lisa Colombo, Incident Command; and Nancy Shimel, Recording Secretary.
  - **Call to Order** – Meeting called to order with Roll Call at 5:25 pm by Chairman, Kevin Jourdain.
  - **Pledge of Allegiance** – All present recited the Pledge of Allegiance.
  - **Soldiers' Home Operational update**  
Kevin Jourdain introduced Mr. Daniel Tsai, Assistant Secretary, EOHHS. Mr. Tsai provided his background as Assistant Secretary for Mass Health and Medicaid for EOHHS, Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Mr. Tsai is the Interim Secretary at EOHHS while Secretary Sudders is leading the COVID-19 Command Center. Mr. Tsai reported that there will be ongoing independent investigations underway to research what has led up to events that have occurred at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke related to the COVID-19 virus. The primary focus is on stabilizing the Home, focusing on patient and staff safety, as well as infection control. He reported that he will be doing everything possible to ensure the veterans are protected with honor and dignity. Mr. Tsai thanked the members of the clinical command team, the National Guard, and the Behavioral Health Network clinical team for their quick response and ongoing commitment to the stabilization of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke. Mr. Tsai also recognized Mr. Spiros Hatiras, CEO, Holyoke Medical Center for his quick response on opening up beds at Holyoke Medical Center for the veterans who tested negative for COVID-19 to be temporarily housed on-site there. He noted that the focus of this meeting will be to provide an update on work that has happened since March 30<sup>th</sup> with the Command Center, being led by Valenda Liptak and Lisa Colombo.
- Lisa Colombo, Executive Vice Chancellor for Commonwealth Medicine at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester, MA, gave an overview of her clinical and administrative background. She is leading the Incident Command Center at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke, along with Valenda Liptak. Lisa reviewed the organization of the clinical command center, including executive clinical experts who have been brought in to assist, as well as identifying focus areas that are currently being addressed within the facility. Ms. Colombo reviewed how the determination for cohorting veterans within the care center units was accomplished, and specifics around cohorting related to COVID-19 testing results for veterans. Ms. Colombo reviewed the ongoing testing process of all veterans and staff, including repeat testing of veterans showing symptoms of COVID-19. Ms. Colombo reviewed the ongoing staffing challenges related to the COVID-19 crisis. The National Guard was engaged very early primarily to complete testing of the veterans and to augment staffing. Ms. Colombo noted that these were the second largest issues, following infection control issues.
- Val Liptak, CEO of Western Massachusetts Hospital, in Westfield, MA gave an overview of her clinical and administrative background. Ms. Liptak is the current Interim Superintendent at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke. Ms. Liptak reported on the current statistics of the veterans at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke, providing current census on-site, as well as those veterans who are currently residing at Holyoke Medical Center. She reviewed current mortality rates to date related to COVID-19. Ms. Liptak reviewed current infection control processes which have been put in place, which include instituting facility practices to prevent spread of virus, terminal cleaning of units, negative air pressure in 1N unit, closing of community spaces, transition to single service food

trays, pharmacy deliveries transitioned to paper, additional housekeeping staff added to industry standard matrix for housekeeping, bulk storage containers brought on site. One unit of the Home (3West) has been cleaned out to prepare for the return of some veterans who are now housed at Holyoke Medical Center. Visitors continue to be restricted from the Home. Ms. Liptak reviewed areas of focus including stabilization of facility, creation of an interim organizational chart, and ongoing monitoring of best practice and hiring controls. Ms. Liptak reported that staff-to-veteran ratios now meet national standards, with all staff having received extra education on infection control. Systems are being tracked and return to work practices being put in place. The members of the Board of Trustees were invited to visit the Home, and were directed to work through Ms. Liptak to arrange.

Kevin Jourdain thanked Mr. Tsai, Ms. Colombo and Ms. Liptak for all of their diligent work and recognized their valiant efforts to lead the Home through this difficult time. He then opened the meeting up to questions from members of the Board of Trustees, requesting mindfulness of the current investigation.

Chris Dupont inquired on the length of time that temporary staff is expected to be kept on-site. Daniel Tsai reported that the National Guard has been essential in complementing the staff on ground, and that the focus on ground is to continue with stabilization. We will look at transitions on how to move forward when the time is right. As of now, will ensure continued resources stay in place. Lisa Colombo also reported that the National Guard has been used as a staff augmentation for current situation. We are currently utilizing the National Guard and staffing agency resources to accomplish delivering care at above average number of hours per patient day. The plan going forward is go provide Human Resources with hiring process guidelines on meeting staffing needs. Will continue to hire permanent staff until there is adequate staff for the Home 24/7. Ms. Colombo reported that nursing executive leaders and facility executives have been hired under a 13-week contract, with ability for contract extension if needed.

Isaac Mass inquired on the current status in place for ceremonies for removal of remains of deceased veterans. Val Liptak noted that the normal process for farewell ceremonies that had previously been in place continues to occur. Family members are called and offered services. She noted there was a short gap where these ceremonies were not taking place.

Isaac Mass inquired if there is a process in place as we move into warmer months to address temperature control/HVAC within the Home. Lisa Colombo reported that a facilities executive is being on boarded tomorrow, as the former Facilities Director position was recently vacated. He is a well qualified individual with a background in regulatory compliance, and part of his role will be the evaluation of the facility and addressing any HVAC issues. We will prepare to address any issues that arise from his evaluation of the Home.

Isaac Mass inquired on process going forward on how the Board of Trustees will be provided with more frequent updates during this crisis. Dan Tsai noted that he will be in discussion with the Board Chairman to discuss preferred method for updates to the Board of Trustees.

Cesar Lopez expressed his condolences on the lost veterans. He thanked the team that is currently in place and all the individuals working to protect the veterans at the Home. Mr. Lopez inquired how status updates are being kept for the veterans currently residing at Holyoke Medical Center. Dan Tsai and Val Liptak are both receiving regular updates from Mr. Hatiras, ensuring the needs of the veterans are being met.

Cesar Lopez inquired if the families of the veterans residing at Holyoke Medical Center are able to communicate with the veterans via electronic video conferencing. Val noted that Holyoke Medical Center is in charge of this process, and that no complaints have been received from families of veterans residing at Holyoke Medical Center.

Chris Dupont inquired on where the public notice is posted so that members of the public can call into the Board of Trustees meetings. Kevin Jourdain reported that the meeting notices, agendas and minutes are all posted on the Mass.Gov Soldiers' Home of Holyoke website.

Kevin Jourdain asked for clarification from Valenda on whether the current interim leadership team will be in place for the foreseeable future. Val confirmed that this will be the case. Dan Tsai assured that there will be stable leadership in place, with Val as acting superintendent, along with a clinical administrator. Once the Home reaches a point of stabilization and is out of crisis mode, the goal will be to establish regular operations with right interim leadership and regular leadership.

Isaac Mass offered his thanks to all who are engaged in the stabilization process and caring for the veterans. He inquired what is being done to share what we are learning with other institutions around the country, and what can those institutions do to engage, and how they can help. Dan Tsai reported that the current focus is on day-to-day stabilization at the Home. Val Liptak confirmed this and reviewed what the community has done. She noted that the immediate focus is on the veterans, staff and families, and that there will be an opportunity to provide briefing to the Board after stabilization. Lisa Colombo noted that the most important thing that could be done is to express support for the staff that continue to show up everyday. She explained that it is important to note that the staff have developed long term relationships with the veterans and are dealing with the emotional impact of losing them. This situation has been challenging for them, and a crisis team has been brought in to assist with the management of this. Dan concurred with this, stressing the importance of supporting the staff on the ground who are caring for the veterans.

Kevin Jourdain inquired if emotional support services are being provided to the families. It was confirmed that we have a crisis support team on site to assist with this. Caseworkers are assigned to families. There is also a chaplain available.

Kevin Jourdain asked how the dormitory veterans are managing in independent living and if there were any positive COVID-19 cases with the dormitory veterans. Val Liptak reported that she and General Driscoll visited the dormitory veterans and no negative feedback was received. She reported that there were no positive COVID-19 tests for the dormitory veterans tested.

Carmen Ostrander inquired what is being done to test veterans and staff to ensure the COVID-19 virus is not coming in. All veterans had a baseline test. It was reported that if a veteran becomes symptomatic they are retested. Many veterans have converted from negative to positive. A baseline test was done for staff. There is one entrance for staff to enter the building, where they are screened daily, with temperatures being taken and screening questions asked. Anyone with a fever over 99.9 cannot enter the building and is referred to follow-up with their primary physician.

Carmen Ostrander asked how often after the baseline test would a person be retested, and if every person retested after 14 days. It was reported that we follow CDC guidelines and only retest if symptoms are displayed. The retest would be done through the employee's personal physician.

Kevin Jourdain inquired on the protocol for staff who have tested positive. Staff are provided documentation of the CDC guidelines. They may not come back until being symptom free for 3 days without fever reducing medication, and this would have to be at least 7 days after being tested. Dan Tsai noted that this process is followed consistently across the healthcare system.

Kevin Jourdain requested a copy of the CDC and DPH guidelines on return to work protocols.

Isaac Mass inquired if education has been provided to staff regarding their contact outside of the clinical setting. Lisa Colombo stated that staff have been educated on the general principles of infection control.

Kevin Jourdain thanked Daniel Tsai, Lisa Colombo and Val Liptak for their leadership and dedication to the veterans and staff. He offered assistance if there is anything that can be done by the Board of Trustees to support their efforts.

Upon motion by Kevin Jourdain and seconded by Cesar Lopez, it was unanimously VOTED to adjourn the meeting at 3:25 pm. Kevin Jourdain conducted a Roll Call Vote of Trustees present. Prior to speaking, each speaker identified themselves by name. The Roll Call Vote is as follows: Christopher Dupont (Yes); Richard Girard (Yes); Cindy Lacoste (Yes) Cesar Lopez (Yes); Isaac Mass (Yes); Carmen Ostrander (Yes); Kevin Jourdain (Yes). The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Shimel  
Acting Secretary for the Board of Trustees