

Public Health Accomplishments in Southern Nevada

March 22, 2007

9:00 a.m.

Dr. Donald S. Kwalick, MD, MPH, Chief Health Officer

This is my 124th consecutive Board of Health meeting beginning with December 1996. In my 10+ years at the Southern Nevada Health District, we've experienced first hand the increased demands the threats of terrorism and emerging infections have placed on public health agencies throughout the U.S. In recent years we've had to focus our efforts on a wide range of priorities, including potential bioterrorism from anthrax and smallpox, to new diseases such as SARS, West Nile Virus, and a possible influenza pandemic.

We've managed to effectively address these priorities without neglecting the ongoing public health needs of our ever expanding community. Our population has increased from 1.1 to about 2 million; our FTE staff from approximately 275 to 550; our budget from approximately \$28 million to \$67 million: 1/3 from county general fund, 1/3 via direct or pass thru Federal funds, and 1/3 fees for services. Unfortunately only \$500,000 of our total budget comes from Nevada state general fund (less than 1%).

Our initiatives and programs have had an enormous impact on the health of the visitors and residents in Southern Nevada. Some of these, not in any priority, include but are not limited to the following:

- Establishing the Office of Public Health Preparedness in cooperation with numerous community partners, at all levels, in order to organize, develop, exercise and implement plans to affectively respond to any man-made or natural, community-wide emergency or disaster;
- Reorganizing and strengthening our Emergency Medical Services System to decrease ambulance wait times in hospital emergency departments;
- Meeting the challenge of developing, organizing and implementing a Regional Trauma System plan to assure quality-of-care, patient safety and efficient use of resources for trauma cases;
- Supporting more stringent tobacco control laws in our community – an effort that culminated in the passage of the Nevada Clean Indoor Air Act in November 2006. This will lead to decreased exposure to second-hand or environmental tobacco smoke (ETS). Enforcement will occur over the next few months;

- Decreasing new cases of tuberculosis from more than 100 in 2000 to approximately 80 cases in '06 through directly observed therapy, case follow up and completion of therapy in a new state-of-the-art TB clinic in North Las Vegas to replace the dilapidated trailer on our main campus;
- Implementing hepatitis A immunization requirements for food handlers, day care attendees and attendants and thereby decreasing the incidence of reported cases county-wide from more than 28 in 1996 to less than 1 per 100,000 population in 2006;
- Constructing and developing the Southern Nevada Public Health Laboratory on our campus. Prior to the opening of this laboratory, Las Vegas was the only metropolitan area in the U.S. without public health laboratory capabilities within 100 miles;
- Partnering with the Southern Nevada Health Access Consortium to implement the first primary care clinic at the Cambridge Community Center with Nevada Health Centers. This accomplishment led to the development of a network of primary care sites to improve access-to-care for the under- and uninsured;

- Developing strategic, business and operational plans with input from all levels of the District for the first time in our 45 years;
- Implementing a youth oriented tobacco control program that contributed to a decrease in adolescent smoking from more than 25 percent in 2001 to less than 20 percent in 2006. Reducing smoking rates leads to a decrease in chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and lung cancer in adulthood;
- Partnering with stakeholders to implement educational and outreach activities leading to fluoridation of Clark County's water supply in March 2000, in order to improve oral health and decrease decayed, missing and filled (DMF) teeth rates in kindergartners and first graders;
- Developing and establishing School Based Health Centers (SBHC) to provide health and health education services on a menu-driven, voluntary, parental-permission basis in the Clark County School District. Three SBHC's were successfully established and transitioned to Nevada Health Centers;
- Expanding our surveillance and environmental control activities to prevent Hantavirus, plague, West Nile Virus and Norovirus infections and other potential outbreaks;

- Developing the Solid Waste Management Hearing Officer process to penalize illegal dumping with monetary penalties throughout the county;
- Strengthening our inspection, education and regulatory functions over food establishments and hotels, motels, public swimming pools, and solid waste disposal to protect the public;
- Planning for a new facility on our main campus to replace this 40+ year old structure that is literally falling down around and under us;
- Expanding and/or developing satellite public health centers in East Las Vegas, North Las Vegas, Henderson and Spring Valley.

These accomplishments are due to the remarkable day-to-day efforts of our dedicated staff and community partners. I am proud to have served the Board of Health and the public, and to have been a part of so many successful efforts to improve the health and well-being of Southern Nevada residents and visitors.

Thank you for your support over these years. My best to you, and all of my co-workers in the future.