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HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE

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House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE HEARING

Topic: COVID-19 Contact Tracing

G-50 Irvis Office Building – Harrisburg, PA

July 29, 2020

AGENDA

- 10:00 a.m. Welcome and Opening Remarks
- 10:10 a.m. Panel from the Pennsylvania Department of Health:
- Sarah Boateng
Executive Deputy Secretary
 - Lindsey Mauldin
Special Assistant on Contact Tracing for Secretary Levine
- 10:20 a.m. *Questions & Answers*
- 10:40 a.m. Panel Two:
- Michel Masters
Division Director of Communicable Disease Control and Prevention
Montgomery County Office of Public Health
 - Dr. Jeff Martin
Chair, Department of Family and Community Medicine, Penn Medicine/LGH
Medical Director, Lancaster County Contact Tracing Program
 - Cynthia Shields
Assistant Deputy Director of Office of Community Services
Allegheny County Department of Human Services
- 11:10 a.m. *Questions & Answers*
- 11:30 a.m. Closing Remarks



House Democratic Policy Committee
Testimony Submitted by Jeffrey R. Martin, MD, FAAFP
Medical Director, Lancaster County Contact Tracing Program
July 29, 2020

Introduction:

Chairman Sturla and other members of the Policy Committee, on behalf of Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health, thank you for inviting us to give testimony to you today.

Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health's mission is "To advance the health and well-being of the communities we serve." We do this through 620-beds at Lancaster General Hospital and Women and Babies Hospital with over 125,000 annual emergency department visits and 35,000 annual discharges. Lancaster General Health Physicians also delivers over 1.2 million outpatient visits in our physician practices, the Ann B. Barshinger Cancer Institute, and our outpatient locations.

Across the country, health systems such as ours, have engaged the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health is no different, except that we live our mission of ensuring the health and safety of our employees, our patients, their families and the entire community without the dedicated support of a public health authority in our county. The unique circumstances in Lancaster County along with over 125 years of providing excellent care in the county moves us to act, engage our partners and move into the vital public health function of contact tracing for the benefit of all.

Timeline of Development of the Lancaster County Contact Tracing Program:

Mid-April 2020: At the request of the Mayor of Lancaster City, Danene Sorace, we reached out to the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA DOH) to ask how we might support the effort and make a case for our health system to provide contact tracing for the citizens of Lancaster. On April 22, Secretary Levine sent us a letter, allowing us, working closely with PA DOH, to start a contact tracing program for the City of Lancaster. We accomplished this initial effort with volunteers and family medicine residents from our health system and furloughed employees from the City of Lancaster. We developed workflows, scripting and a follow up process that included medical, behavioral health and social barrier support.

Mid-May 2020: With the surge of COVID-19 behind us and the learning curve of how to do contact tracing in front of us, we reached out to our County Commissioners with a proposal to do this work, using CARES ACT funding, for the entire County of Lancaster. Providing contact tracing in a county without a centralized public health authority proved daunting, but we developed workflows, involving multiple systems and databases that would allow all health care entities, to upload positive cases in a privacy protected and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) compliant manner to a centralized platform. From here, we called the cases, developed lists of contacts, reached out to those contacts and enrolled them in the contact tracing follow up program identified by the state, Sara Alert. All the while, we maintained our fundamental goal of keeping identified cases and contacts in touch with their health care provider, screened and provided support for social barriers and behavioral health concerns.

June 2020: To ensure that the entire county could benefit from contact tracing, Lancaster Health Center (who had been doing contact tracing even before we started) and Wellspan Ephrata Community Hospital both decided to join our unified effort. To my knowledge, this is the first time that separate health care entities cooperated on a countywide public health effort at this scale in our county.

July 2020: To date we have reached out to over 1,300 contacts, providing support and quarantine guidance. We have trained and employed more than 50 contact tracers, nurse investigators and administrators to run the daily operations. We are open seven days a week and receive daily uploads of cases into the contact tracing workflow three times a day. We have brought to the effort literally hundreds of health care providers, information technology staff, epidemiologists, workflow specialists, behavioral health experts and social service workers. In addition, we have managed to maintain the confidentiality, privacy and connection for persons affected by COVID-19 back to their identified health system. We are heartened by the community and health system response to this effort and would not be where we are today without the engagement of all.

Successes:

- We have forged close and timely relationships with not only our local State Health Nurses but also those at PA DOH, most notably Jennifer Shirk, from the PA DOH Bureau of Community Health Systems (DOH-BCHS). And many others have been quite responsive to our questions.
- We have worked closely, under PA DOH guidance to help model outbreaks, provide testing and information to our nursing homes and discrete populations such as the Amish and Mennonites in Lancaster County.
- We have worked tirelessly to support and engage other vulnerable populations like those who are homeless; those living in congregant settings and those disproportionately affected by the virus.
- We continue to give guidance and support to employers, schools and others in our community.
- We have established avenues for testing open to all in our county.
- We have modeled a local public health intervention utilizing public and private partnerships that benefits the entire population of Lancaster County.

Challenges:

- The turnaround times for COVID-19 test results have been highly variable and dependent on lab supply chains, daily volume, guidance and understanding around who should and who should not be tested and disparate understanding about the utility of asymptomatic testing.
- Turnaround times impact the ability for contact tracing to affect pandemic spread, with 72 hours as the limit of what can reasonably be effective as a goal.
- We have been unable to model from a population health perspective the full extent of the outbreak in Lancaster County, mainly because the Lancaster County Contract Tracing Center does not have access to all the positive cases in the county.
- We have not been able to provide local actionable advice about disease outbreaks and how to roll out asymptomatic testing to at-risk groups. However, PA DOH has been collaborative when outbreaks do occur.

Opportunities:

- Our contact tracing initiative has seen success as a locally grown and executed public health benefit to all those living in Lancaster County. This success linked us with employers, schools and others about how to continue to safely “open-up” as the COVID-19 pandemic continues.
- We have seen how an increase in testing capacity, linked to our health system can benefit all with better turnaround times and an electronic interface to the contact tracing program.



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- Through our school-based health clinics at the primary, secondary and post-secondary level and our sports medicine services throughout the county we have relationships that can help schools with opening advice, mitigation planning and modeling how to work through school cases and do contact tracing in and outside the facility.

Our extensive connections with the post-acute network with employed medical directors in 10 Nursing Homes in the county is an effective conduit for understanding asymptomatic testing and outbreaks in all the nursing facilities in Lancaster. We feel we can roll this advice out to personal care homes and other congregant settings in the county as well.

I started these comments with sharing our underlying mission of Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health to advance the health and well-being of the communities we serve. With the support of the Pennsylvania Department of Health and our local leaders, including our county commissioners, I believe we have met the challenge of this mission with regards to the COVID-19 pandemic. The future is difficult to predict but we remain steadfast in our belief that we will engage the challenges posed by this pandemic moving forward. Thank you for your invitation and allowing us to talk about contact tracing today.