

Minutes of the August 10, 2021, meeting of the Upstate COVID-19 Regional Community Assessment Review and Equity (CARE) Panel

The Upstate COVID-19 Regional Community Assessment Review and Equity (CARE) Panel met on Wednesday, August 10, 2021 at 9:00 am via Microsoft Teams.

The following were in attendance:

Sue Veer, Carolina Health Centers, Inc.
Kandi Fredere, SCDHEC
Juana Slade, AnMed Health
Rebecca Leach, SC Retail Association
Heather Goss, AccessHealth Mountain Lakes
Trey Moore, Abbeville Area Medical Center

Sue Veer, CARE Panel Chairperson, called the meeting to order.

Brief introductions provided.

Item 1: General Updates:

- Numbers continue to go up with COVID. Unfortunately, we are seeing high number of cases and have had to bring additional staff back in for case investigations.
- Biggest concern is preparing for back to school and being supportive of our communities and school districts. We had some of the first districts to go back to school in our region. Anticipate a lot of questions and navigating through the systems as the majority go back next week.
- Uptick in request for vaccine clinics. Trying to field those requests. Working with partners to meet those needs.
- The Upstate Health Departments have free testing and vaccination clinics Monday – Friday. If you have someone that needs tested/vaccinated navigate them towards the site as needed.
- The recent uptick is concerning. Local hospitals are at capacity right now. Seen more positive cases in the last week and half than the last 3 months. Majority of hospitalized patients are unvaccinated. Younger, unvaccinated are ending up sick and in hospitals. Continued emphasis on vaccination is needed.
- Employee mandates are being issued. Discussed exemptions: Religious exemption, requiring letter from pastor/religious leader; medical exemption, letter from physician; pregnancy exemption.
- Discussed medical exemptions for pregnancy.
- We anticipate that of remaining employees that are not vaccinated, we will lose workforce. Will we be able to handle the increase workload with that loss?
- We have to recognize that hospital systems will set the tone for everyone else. If we say it's dangerous/deadly, that is the message consumers hear and see from us in our actions. As a consumer, in support of what clinicians/scientists are trying to understand.
- Of the COVID related deaths due to Delta variant, is it different as before? What are some medical exemptions being used to refuse the vaccine?
- About 60% of country is vaccinated, 98% of hospitalization/deaths are those of unvaccinated people. Need to continue to emphasize the importance of vaccinations.
- Discussed incentives and possible reverse incentives (refer friends) being provided for vaccinations.
- Exemptions – DHEC does not provide any kind of exemptions for adults. We are mandated to provide religious exemptions for children but not for adults. Getting a lot of calls for that.

Item 2: Discussion of Health Equity Learning Collaboration:

- Will table this topic for a future meeting.

Item 3: Closure Process for Ending CARE Panel:

- We have talked about disbanding this group and going into a broad Public Health Equity focus. Leaning towards, based on fact we have school starting back, have a meeting in a couple of weeks to check in.
- All agreed that it is a good idea to see where we are in a couple of weeks.

- Will touch base with other panel members no on the call to see how they are doing.

Item 4: Tasks:

- Minutes will be sent out and posted on the SCDHEC website.
- Sue will share mandate announcement and FAQ provided to their employees.
- Will schedule a follow-up meeting in 2 – 3 weeks.

Meeting adjourned.

Next Scheduled Meeting
TBD