

MINUTES
SENATE HEALTH & WELFARE COMMITTEE

- DATE:** Tuesday, January 18, 2022
- TIME:** 3:00 P.M.
- PLACE:** Room WW54
- MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Martin, Vice Chairman Riggs, Senators Heider, Lee, Harris, VanOrder (Bair), Stennett, and Wintrow
- ABSENT/ EXCUSED:** Senator Zito
- NOTE:** The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.
- CONVENED:** **Chairman Martin** called the meeting of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee (Committee) to order at 3:00 p.m.
- PRESENTATION:** **Dr. Ann Huntington**, Hospital Medicine Physician at Saint Luke's and Medical Director of the Boise, Meridian Hospitalist at St. Luke's. She relayed she was employed by St. Luke's, but not officially representing them today and won't be discussing any policies or any of the decisions at the health system level. This is purely a message of the clinicians and the frontline medical providers. **Dr. Huntington** provided details on COVID-19 including symptoms, those most affected and their medical needs. Nurses, doctors, and other medical staff were working tirelessly to help patients recover. She explained long COVID symptoms such as fatigue, shortness of breath, and cognitive issues may affect up to 15% of Idahoans. **Dr. Huntington** provided several stories of nurses and doctors spending time holding hands and caring for patients in their last minutes of life.
- COMMITTEE QUESTIONS:** In response to Committee questions about what Idahoans and Legislators could do to help. **Dr. Huntington** responded that easier access to COVID-19 testing to lower emergency department visits, assist public health officials to get the information out, more residency programs to have a pipeline for more physicians, and emotional support were valuable as well.
- PRESENTATION:** **Mr. Tom Murphy**, CEO, Minidoka Memorial Hospital. Mr. Murphy provided details on what the hospital had done during COVID-19. The impact on patients had been seen in the inability to transfer critical patients to other hospitals and not being set up for the critical care required for COVID-19 patients. Employees had been impacted by covering more shifts to assist with the case load. **Mr. Murphy** reports losing nurses to travel nursing and early retirement due to burnout. He asked the Committee to support the education budget to enable more people to get their certification or degrees to assist with the shortage. The hospital had been seeing a shortage of supplies sometimes causing delays in treatments. Hospitals were not able to work on future planning and growth due to the time it takes to deal with day to day operations through this pandemic. They did receive Cares Act Funding and State assistance and thanked the Senators for helping with that. (see Attachment 1)
- COMMITTEE QUESTIONS:** How had the cancellation of procedures affected the revenue of the hospital. **Mr. Murphy** reports his hospital had made it through okay but without the Cares Act and federal funds many small hospitals in Idaho would have not survived. He stated some larger hospitals were reporting as many as 5,000 postponed surgeries.

DISCUSSION: **Chairman Martin** explained to the Committee there was a handout in their packets for them to review. (see Attachment 2)

PRESENTATION: **Dr. Marcia Witte**, Division of Public Health, Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (DHW) and Internist, St. Luke's McCall, introduced herself. **Dr. Witte** talked about outpatient therapeutics for COVID-19 and the departments role in the distribution.

- long acting monoclonal antibodies for pre-exposure or prevention
- monoclonal antibodies for post-exposure and treatment of mild to moderate COVID-19
- oral antiviral medications for the treatment of lab confirmed mild to moderate COVID-19 in individuals at high risk for progressing to severe disease

Dr. Witte relayed there was limited supply of some therapeutics so distribution had been a challenge. Several medications were not effective against the Omicron variant and they were transitioning away from their use. She also discussed the ways information had been relayed to providers and the public. (see Attachment 3)

DISCUSSION: **Chairman Martin** referred the Committee to the handout he spoke about earlier. He emphasized the death toll at 122 people per legislative district. **Senator Wintrow** would like to have Chairman Martin have insurers provide information on who was paying the bills and what were the long term impact to premiums, how the Indigent CAT Fund was being affected and the impact on hospitals. **Chairman Martin** reported there would be other groups providing that information in upcoming meetings. He reminded the Committee the Indigent CAT Fund was being changed and would hopefully have a bill to make sure hospitals would be made whole.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Martin** adjourned the meeting at 4:11 p.m.

Senator Martin
Chair

Lena Amoah
Secretary