

Maine Asthma Council Minutes
December 3, 2008

Attendees: Norm Anderson, Veronica Boucher, Lisa Burgess, Marvin Cling, Christy Crocker, Peter Doran, Sue Lee (for Eric Frohberg), Valli Geiger, Ruth Lawson-Stopps, Dwight Littlefield, Leslie Manning, Ed Miller, Desi-Rae Severson, Lee Scott, RuthAnne Spence, Annabelle Suarez, Tracy Wall, Leslie Walleigh, Martha Webster,

Via Phone: Barbara Chilmonczyk, Pat Fallon, Ginger Jordan-Hillier, Rhona Julien, Donna Levi, Jessica Loney, Amy Olfene, Helen Roy, Rhonda Vosmus

Introductions:

- Ruth Lawson-Stopps welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Maine Center for Public Health for allowing us the use of their meeting facility.
- Members introduced themselves and briefly described how their work related to asthma.

Norm Anderson Presentation:

- Presented data from the energy use survey conducted by Critical Insight. This was the first survey of its kind to link health and home heating/energy issues.
- Norm explained the intent of the survey was to see what decisions people would be making in heating their homes this winter.
- There was discussion about the sample size and that only people who could control their home energy choices were represented. There were concerns that a portion of the public was missing.
- It was established that the survey is only representative of people who had the capability of changing their future energy uses. There is still the bottom line issue that a portion of the population is at risk for making harmful choices with respect to air quality.
- There is a clear need to inform and educate people about their energy choices.

Presentation Discussion:

- The issue of the safety of pellet stoves was discussed. The EPA claims they are among the cleanest wood burning stoves available – when they are properly installed.
- The effects of biomass burning have not really been investigated.
- The quality of the wood pellet also plays a role in the way it burns.
- Maine does not have the ability to enforce a “No-Burn Day.”
- Questions were raised about the health effects of people living in mobile homes compared to people living in stick-built homes. Norm Anderson said he could try to find more data comparing the two for those who are interested.

Workgroup Updates:

- The Homes group has already met and is in the process of developing action steps and brainstorming goals and ideas. They are thinking of collaborating with code enforcement officers and public health nurses.
- The Workplace group will be tied into the already existing Maine Occupational Research Agenda (MORA). The workplaces group will meet the second Wednesday of every month at the Bureau of Labor Standards Commerce Center Building prior to the beginning of the MORA monthly meeting.
- At this time, the Outdoor Air group will not be going forward.
- There was concern that the Public Health Infrastructure and Surveillance group would not form but after the discussion regarding wood stoves and the energy issues this group seemed important enough to pursue. Peter Doran suggested reaching out and pushing this group forward to impact current policy issues.
- The Schools group is looking at the minimum common program components of the Healthy Maine Partnership contracts. They are also trying to address the student to school nurse ratio. It was suggested that the schools group look into the position in the Bureau of General Services that is currently frozen and needs activity.

Website and list serve:

- The Maine Asthma Program website is redesigned and is ready for a soft launch test.
- The site will be loaded live and after State departmental internal review, the link will be sent to all council members for feedback on content, ease of use, effectiveness, trouble-shooting and any other thoughts, comments, or ideas.
- The list serve is being set up through InforME. InforME is the company who hosts the States of Maine's website. When the list serve is active members will be added. The intent of the list serve is for council members to notify each other of items not just limited to the asthma program.

Announcement of programs and activities:

- Dona Levi informed the council that there will be an IHI teleconference broadcast by MaineHealth December 10 and 11. This is a plenary session on health care improvement.
- Rhona Julien will send along information on how to Translate Research into Healthy Homes Improvement regarding commercial pest control.
- The Lung Association is addressing policy issues on how they can minimize the health impact of people in lower socioeconomic classes. This will revolve around improving access to care and closing loopholes in the tobacco laws regarding smoke-free workplaces.
- Budgetary issues are also adding a strain on the ratio of school nurses to students. The Lung Association sees no change as long as school nurses are tied to school funding. Some form of restructuring needs to take place. The lung association encourages all council members to sign up for their e-advocacy campaign on their website.

Partnership project with Maine Primary Care Association:

- Maine Primary Care in collaboration with the asthma program is offering a learning collaborative beginning January 15, 2009. This will be bringing the planned care model developed around evidence-based guidelines. The asthma collaborative is being launched in the region of the State with the highest burden of asthma.
- It was suggested to invite school coaches to participate in this collaborative if possible.

Future agenda items:

- Talk more about the role and importance of Asthma Educators
- Policy issues
- Direction of the Workplaces group
- Volunteers wanted for presentations
- By-laws to revise

Other:

- Discussion came up on how we can get the most benefit from the burden report.
- A question was asked if a sub-group should be formed to look at the data and find the avoidable cost of asthma and bring that information to the legislature.
- That information should also be shared with providers who may not know the burden and cost.
- Merck works with provider groups to educate them. Merck sees the cost and burden of asthma as something they could certainly share with providers.
- Perhaps a social marketing campaign could be launched around the issue of cost to show how much it costs when someone misses work or school due to asthma.