

**Benefits Focus Group Minutes
(3/27/02)**

Committee members, alternates and staff advisors present:

John Agen
Benita Saldutti
Ed Whitehead
Andy St. John
Pat Horan
Neal Elliott
Dick Minster
Linda McKinney
KayKae Thomas
Casey Humpert
Stacey Monroe
Joyce Dolan
Suzy Milburn
John Glanden
Veda Mahadi (for Gil Fernandez)
Robert Blinch-Edwards

Meeting began at 1:05 p.m., March 27, 2002, at the Public Works Department, 1762 12th Street.

John Agen began by asking that members of the Group try to attend all meetings. If unable to attend, he would like them to let the Group know and send an alternate if possible. If a member misses three meetings in a row, his suggestion is to get a replacement for them. Each meeting will begin with a roll call. Roll was called.

Suzy Milburn said that due to their department's work load, she would be the only representative from Housing and Community Development and that Debbi Horst would be an alternate member.

Meetings will be every Wednesday at 1:00 p.m. in the Commission Chambers unless otherwise noted.

Benita Saldutti asked that the minutes be clearly marked as "draft" until approved and that the Chairperson sign them after approval. The date of approval should also be noted.

Mr. Agen asked the Group if they would be willing to allow members of the audience a chance to speak during the meetings. Their time could be limited to a few minutes.

Linda McKinney reported that John Agen and Benita Saldutti had presented the Group's recommendation to the City Commission at the meeting of March 18. The Commission accepted it unanimously. On April 1, the necessary funds will be transferred to the health insurance fund to cover the remainder of the year.

Ms. McKinney the Group if they would approve having a non-voting member from HealthCare Sarasota. The PBA had made this requested when they signed their Memorandum of Understanding with the City. The Group approved. She introduced Robert Blinch-Edwards, Executive Director of Healthcare Sarasota. Teri Weber will be his alternate.

Ms. McKinney also said she thought there should be a representative from the Building Department since it was such a large department. She will follow up on that.

Mr. Agen said he would like a more formalized agenda set for each meeting. Ms. McKinney will draft an agenda for approval by Mr. Agen and Ms. Saldutti.

Discussion was turned toward long-term solutions.

Ms. McKinney said that Mr. Blinch-Edwards had been asked to the meeting today to speak about the Wellness Program. Mr. Blinch-Edwards began to speak regarding wellness. He mentioned the recent health screenings that had been offered to employees. Forty-six people participated.

He gave a brief history of Healthcare Sarasota, how it started and the members who currently participate. There was some discussion about the effect on the City if the School Board decided to participate in Healthcare Sarasota. It could provide higher discounts for services.

There were some questions and discussion of flexible spending accounts and their benefit.

Discussion returned to wellness and preventative care. Healthcare Sarasota is trying to get people more involved with prevention. Mr. Blinch-Edwards handed out a list of Wellness Workshop topics. He also handed out a survey to measure interest in each topic. He would like to have the surveys filled out by as many active employees and retirees as possible. This will form the basis of the Wellness Program for the City.

Ms. McKinney said that the surveys could be emailed to active employees and sent by regular mail to retirees. Retiree email addresses will be requested to save postage on future communications.

In order to get a commitment from participants in the wellness classes, they are required to pay an amount (example: \$25 for weight management class). If they successfully complete the course, they are reimbursed. If they do not complete the course, their money is not refunded.

Focusing on preventative care and wellness will benefit the whole community. The return on investment on prevention and wellness is a proven fact. Mr. Blinch-Edwards referenced the article (attached to the handout Healthcare Sarasota Wellness Programs – Draft) about Johnson & Johnson Company and the savings realized from their Wellness Program. There has been a lot of research in this area. The website for Wellness Council of American provides a lot of information. He suggested that the City needed to look into this approach more proactively because the lack of prevention is one of the major reasons that health care costs are so high.

The City needs to have a plan and a program in place where possible rewards and incentives are in place. Mr. Blinch-Edwards and Ms. McKinney will work on devising a draft program and would like the Group to give input. The draft will be presented to the Group for their approval and/or revision.

Suzy Milburn asked about Sarasota County's wellness program and if the Group could get some information about their plan. Mr. Blinch-Edwards gave a brief description about the points awarded for certain improvements (i.e. lower cholesterol, stop smoking, lose or maintain weight) and the reward goes into the employee's flex plan. The goal is to keep the healthy people healthy and encourage the ones who are unhealthy to get healthy within the ADA guidelines. Ms. McKinney mentioned that for reference the City is running 4-5% (as of 12/31/01) above the cost for the previous year. The current trend is 12-14%. Sarasota County is in negative numbers; however, some of their savings are due to a change in their prescription plan.

There was a discussion about the high cost of prescription drugs and educating people to ask for generic drugs when available. Ms. Saldutti asked if there was any type of program to monitor or educate the doctors about prescribing lower cost drugs. Caremark is the City's Pharmacy Benefit Manager (PBM). They look at physician profiling to monitor what drugs they are prescribing. If they find a certain drug is being over prescribed they contact the physician. The Physician's Hospital Organization (PHO) monitors the physicians and reports to Healthcare Sarasota.

There was a discussion about developing a policy for certain physical requirements or screenings prior to employment to the extent that it is legal and practical. For example, hiring only non-smokers and those who maintain a healthy weight. This could be an option to consider for long term. Legal and ADA issues would have to be considered in developing this type of policy.

Ms. McKinney asked if the Group would like her to email the survey to all active employees and request responses by next week. She said she would send it to the Directors first and then to everyone. Mr. Agen said he would like to have it mentioned in the cover letter that it is being sponsored by the Benefits Focus Group.

She also asked if the Group would like to have someone from Sarasota County come to a meeting to talk about their wellness program. Mr. Blinch-Edwards said they are in the process of redesigning their documents, so that may have to wait for a couple of weeks.

They are redefining the program to accommodate some legal problems. Ms. McKinney asked if he could provide the Group with a copy of the current document, just so they could get an idea of it. He said he would contact the County to see if was okay for him to share that with the City.

Mr. Blinch-Edwards said he would like to stress the importance of all employees filling out the Health Risk Assessments during the screenings. This enables the employee to receive a health profile. The information is all kept confidential. Perhaps it could be build into the policy that a lower deductible, or some other incentive, will be available to those who have completed the assessment.

John Glanden asked that the Group address the retiree group that is under Medicare coverage and how the City plan applies to them. Ms. McKinney said that was something the Group needs to look at – the concept of one plan for all. The other thing the Group needs to consider is having one signup in January for everyone.

Joyce Dolan asked that the issue of healthcare benefits for the surviving spouse of a retiree also be addressed. She would like to investigate how high their premiums can go. Ms. McKinney said they would go as high as the cost goes – that is what COBRA is. COBRA says that you pay the cost. Mr. Agen wanted to make the situation clear to the Group. The Widow of a retiree is eligible to go into COBRA for a period of time. By law, COBRA only has to be offered for 18 months. The City, by practice, has been offering that forever. The City has met the high end of the law by not capping off the length of coverage. Mr. Agen asked if Ms. McKinney could research the subject. There are times when the subject comes up and there is difficulty in finding where it is actually written. He would like to have that for the next meeting. Ms. McKinney asked if he wanted to se the actual COBRA law or the City practice. A precedent was set in the past. He would like to know when it was set. The question was asked if that practice came out of the 1993 Ordinance. Ms. McKinney said she would research it.

Next meeting will be April 3, 2002, at 1:00 p.m., in the Commission Chambers.

Meeting was adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

Minutes Approved: _____

John Agen, Chairperson