

**SUFFOLK COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES**

**ANNUAL PUBLIC HEALTH HEARINGS**

APRIL 14, 2011  
SEPTEMBER 20, 2011

**James L. Tomarken, MD, MSW, MPH, MBA, FRCPC, FACP**

**December 21, 2011**

# **SUFFOLK COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES**

## **2011 Public Health Hearings**

April 14, 2011 – 225 Rabro Drive East, Hauppauge, NY  
September 20, 2011 – Evans K. Griffing Building, 300 Center Drive, Riverhead, NY

### **Background**

Resolution No. 669-1999, as amended by Resolution No. 1142-1999 and Resolution No. 167-2007, directs the Department of Health Services to hold two public hearings each year to obtain input from county residents as to the quality of the health care delivery system and how it services their needs. Pursuant to these resolutions, a public health hearing was held on April 14, 2011, from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. in the administrative offices of the Suffolk County Department of Health Services at 225 Rabro Drive East in Hauppauge. A second public health hearing was held on September 20, 2011, from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. in the Legislative Auditorium at the Evans K. Griffing Building located at 300 Center Drive, Riverhead.

For each of these events, a news release was issued by the Department of Health Services in order to inform the public of the date, time and location of the event. The releases were faxed to all local broadcast media, as well as daily and weekly newspapers. In addition, copies of releases and flyers announcing the events were mailed to all Suffolk County Legislators, Town Supervisors, Suffolk County libraries, and Suffolk County Health Center Advisory Board Chairpersons.

Flyers were also sent for posting at SCDHS health centers, mental hygiene clinics and the John J. Foley Skilled Nursing Facility.

James L. Tomarken, MD, MSW, MPH, MBA, FRCPC, FACP, Commissioner, Suffolk County Department of Health Services, conducted the hearings. Public Relations Director Grace Kelly-McGovern was present for the hearings.

No written testimony was submitted subsequent to the hearings.

**Summary of Public Health Hearing held April 14,2011**

Dr. James Tomarken, Commissioner, Suffolk County Department of Health Services opened the hearing and noted that he was there to listen to all concerns regarding the issues that relate to the Department of Health Services.

### **County Health Centers**

Timothy Stuart, patient and advisory board member of the Maxine Postal Health Center in Amityville, said the services he receives from the health center have kept him alive and enabled him to have a good quality of life. He expressed concerns about proposed financial cuts to the health center system and said he would like it if the patients and advisory board members had a greater voice in in affairs concerning the centers. He proposed raising taxes to fund health center operations.

Geri Walsh, patient and advisory board member of the South Brookhaven Health Centers, expressed concerns that proposed cuts in funding for the Shirley, Patchogue and Brentwood Health Centers might jeopardise the application for the health centers to become Federally Qualify Health Centers (FQHC).

The following individuals spoke on behalf of the Dolan Family Health Center in Huntington:

- Dr. Ron Gaudrault, Trustee, Huntinton Hospital; member of the Dolan Family Health Center Advisory Board, member of the Suffolk County Department of Health Services Board of Health
- Deidre Campbell, patient, Dolan Family Health Center
- Dr. Warren Gehrhardt, Medical Director, Dolan Family Health Center
- Peggy Boyd, Social Worker, Family Service League
- Donna Marie Flumignan, Assistant Nurse Manager, Dolan Family Health Center, on behalf of herself and patient Kimberly Klaboe Frances Leogrande.
- Sherry Scammacca, employee, Dolan Family Health Center
- Dolores Thompson, Chair, Dolan Family Health Center Advisory Board, Trustee, Huntington Hospital board
- Darby Cardona, patient, Dolan Family Health Center
- Richard Koubek, Chair, Welfare to Work Commission, Suffolk County Legislature
- Dr. William Spencer, Chief of Otolaryngology, Huntington Hospital, Associate Professor, Stony Brook University Huntington

Each of the above-mentioned persons spoke about the proposed cuts in funding to the Dolan Family Health Center. Several facts about the center were offered: the Dolan Family Health Center was started 16 years ago; last year the center treated 9,961 patients, issued 500 immunizations and administered prenatal care to 335 patients. Speakers noted that there is a need in the community for the health center and said that the Dolan Family Health Center offered first-rate health care. The health center, they said, was an answer to the community's health care challenges, and they noted that if it were to close, patients will not receive preventative health care and will overburden the emergency room at the local hospital and other health care facilities when they become sick. Travel expenses to other facilities, such as Huntington Hospital, the Martin Luther King County Health Center in Wyandanch, and the hospital clinic in New Hyde Park, are prohibitive, they said.

Also in attendance at the hearing were: Terence Smith of the Dolan Family Health Center and John Goodwin of the South Brookhaven Health Centers.

## Summary of Public Health Hearing held September 20, 2011

### **County Health Centers**

Geri Walsh, patient and advisory board member of the South Brookhaven Health Centers, expressed concerns about how cuts to the health centers would affect the application for Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) Look-Alike Status and about the sliding scale fee for service.

Nancy Marr spoke about the need to keep the population healthy in order to curtail the rise in Medicare costs. She stated that she would rather see a small rise in taxes rather than cuts to the health centers.

Legislator Ed Romaine, speaking for the record, said that the issues of funding cross jurisdictional boundaries. He stated that the closing of the health centers would drive people to emergency rooms of hospitals that are already burdened with financial concerns.

Paula Hoffman, patient of the Krause Family Health Center in South Hampton, said thank you for providing services for older people and young women who cannot afford a private doctor or lab costs.

### **Other Issues**

Legislator Ed Romaine spoke on several issues.

-- **Certified Home Health Agency:** Legislator Romaine said that selling the license for the home health agency is against the Marry Hibbard law and that doing so would be a one-shot budget solution.

-- **County Budget:** "Across the board cuts are the wrong thing to do." Legislator Romaine said the county needs to protect its core mission and functions: policing, health care services, social services and public works.

-- **Tick-borne Diseases:** The legislator said he would like to get the tick-and-vector-borne disease task force up and running. He noted that babesiosis, lichiosis and Lyme disease, all tick-borne diseases, are often misdiagnosed and said that treatment should not be standardized

-- **Ground water:** Legislator Romaine said one of the best things that the health department has going for it is its ground water testing unit; it was this unit that caught the plume coming from the Navy facility in Calverton. The legislator would like to see the unit expanded and the fee for well testing waived, and he noted that testing (which was once free) would give the county invaluable information regarding the county's ground water.

-- **Dredging:** There are a number of creeks that are bottled up (many with duck feces) and require environmental dredging,

-- **Waste-water management:** We are failing in this area, said the legislator, who added that cesspools are contributing 40 to 50 milligrams per liter of nitrogen into our surface waters and aquifers. We will destroy the environment if we don't adopt alternative systems, he said.

-- **Public Health Nursing:** The legislator said that the infirmed who live on the east end have very little chance of getting help and that SCDHS has very few people assigned to this area. He said the mission of the department is critical to the citizens of the county.

Also in attendance at this hearing were: Patricia Stearns and Stella Pohanis of the Department of Health Services and Timothy Rothang, resident of Mastic.