Board of Directors Zoom Board Meeting
Minutes
July 26, 2021

Present: Laurence B. Simon, Chairman; Melissa Gibbons, Secretary; Suzanne Brown; Christopher Carter; Nisha Hurst; Richard Kaplan; Joan Merrill

Absent: Paul Hopper; Nirmal Patel, MD MPH

Staff: Chris Ann Bennett, Infection Preventionist; Nadia Benson, Deputy and Director of Nursing; Linda Marini, Assistant to Executive Director; John Mastronardi, Executive Director; Scott Neff, FNW Executive Director; Nunzio Raimo, Director of Financial Operations; Carissa Ronish, Therapeutic Recreation Administrator; Justine Vaccaro, Director of Social Work; Larry Vanterpool, Facilities Director; Dr. Frank Walsh, Medical Director

Guests: Amy Badini; Andy Duus, BET Liaison; Elizabeth Franklin-Quigley; Paul Scholtes; Mary Alice Schulte; Sheilah Smith; Ellen Wolfson, Commission on Aging;

Mr. Simon opened the meeting at 5:04 PM via Zoom Webinar and noted that a quorum was present.

Medical Director’s Report – Dr. Frank Walsh

Dr. Walsh reported that the number of admissions is on the rise, with 7 this past Saturday alone. Orthopedic cases still account for a large percentage (38%) of short-term admissions from the hospital with medical representing the balance.

There has not been a COVID positive case among the staff or residents in 66 days, and indoor and outdoor visitation continues.

- 76.6% of staff have been vaccinated; 87% of staff and volunteers
- Over 90% of residents have been vaccinated
- Dr. Walsh continues to encourage staff to get vaccinated. He suggests staff get the J & J vaccine because it is similar to the flu vaccine as far as anticipated side effects.
Our Census today is 183. Dr. Walsh noted that Greenwich Woods, which has more beds than NW (217), currently has a census of 75.

Dr Walsh stated that there has been an uptick in COVID positive cases nationwide, primarily in unvaccinated people. He has seen a large number of people in his practice getting tested, and the majority testing positive are unvaccinated individuals; most have not exhibited severe illness.

The Connecticut state positivity rate was 1.4% and has risen to 1.6% this week. We at NW continue to follow all CDC and DPH guidelines with regard to testing staff and the unvaccinated in the facility.

To Mr. Kaplan’s question as to whether we require new admissions to be vaccinated, Ms. Benson responded that we will accept an unvaccinated resident (long-term and short-term), but they will follow quarantine protocol. Ms. Bennett stated that we ask new admissions if they wish to be vaccinated, and we will make appointments and transport those who wish to be vaccinated. This includes long-term residents, who may have refused the vaccine in the past and now wish to receive it.

At Mr. Simon’s request, Ms. Bennett will provide the same vaccination statistics on the long and short-term residents as she does regarding the staff.

Mr. Simon noted that the number of residents being hospitalized varied between 2 and 5 this month. Dr. Walsh explained that since we are admitting patients with higher acuity than a year ago, this can definitely be a factor with regard to hospitalizations.

**Review/Approval of Minutes of June 21, 2021**

A motion to approve the minutes of June 21, 2021 was made by Ms. Hurst, seconded by Mr. Kaplan. A vote was taken, and the minutes were approved by a vote of 7-0-0.

**Executive Director’s Report - presented by John Mastronardi**

Suspected GI outbreak – From May 6th through May 20th we were being monitored as part of a suspected GI outbreak. Residents have since recovered and any related issues have been resolved. The majority of the residents that were monitored via the DPH mandated GI line lists, did not have true GI concerns or symptoms. Ms. Chris Ann Bennett will elaborate further during her report later in this meeting.

HealthStream – We have partnered with a company called HealthStream, which is an e-learning website, for employees to be educated and trained on core competencies, certification core course, mandatory training and refresher courses.
Ascripts – We are engaging with Ascripts, a company which pursues pharmacy rebates that our pharmacy vendor does not pass on to us. The Ascripts application will communicate with our EMR, Matrix Care, and identify pharmacy rebates that would otherwise not be pursued. Their fee is 28% of the monthly savings, with the balance going to NW. Ascripts estimates savings between $3K and $10K per month but Mr. Mastronardi believes a more conservative estimate of our savings to be between $1K to $2K per month.

PatientPing – Mr. Mastronardi reported that we are working with PatientPing, a care collaboration application that tracks patient outcomes while they are in our care and within the 30 – 90 days post discharge window. This will help us reduce hospital readmissions and emergency department visits, and we will be able to collaborate/coordinate more effectively with the accountable care organizations. We will be able to check in and follow-up with patients post discharge to make sure they are doing well.

Nursing Report - presented by Nadia Benson and Chris Ann Bennett

Ms. Benson reported the following concerning current staffing ratios:

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<th>Day Shift</th>
<th>Evening Shift</th>
<th>Night Shift</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long-Term</td>
<td>5 to 1</td>
<td>8 to 1</td>
<td>13 to 1</td>
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<td>Short-Term</td>
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<td>Total Nurse + CNA to residents</td>
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Ms. Benson stated that we are providing fiscally responsible and safe staffing. Changes we have made to staffing have not affected our quality of care.

Ms. Benson reported that we are currently having difficulty hiring CNAs because we are competing with unemployment. Our CNA’s start at $18/hour which is comparable to what they can make on unemployment. Ms. Benson expects there will be larger pool of qualified applicants, and that people will want to return to work, come September when the extra unemployment is no longer available.

Mr. Kaplan asked about the use of a staffing companies. Ms. Benson explained that they have entertained the idea, but it is very costly. For example, one company quoted $32/hour/ CNA; $58/hour/LPN; $75/hour/RN. Mr. Simon noted that the Teamster contract is still in negotiation. He stated that the low CNA salary is a real obstacle to hiring and thinks this should be addressed before a contract is signed.

Mr. Kaplan asked if Ms. Benson has considered hiring back past employees; Ms. Benson will look into that as an option.

Ms. Benson noted that there are proposed staffing requirements for the state of Connecticut; currently, our staffing meets those proposed staffing ratios. Mr. Simon calculated the current hours per resident per day at 4.33 hours.
Mr. Simon stated that with the Teamster contact about to be settled over the next two weeks, the contract will provide a base rate of about $20.50/$21 per hour for CNA’s, and also look to shorten the 24-month probationary period. (See note below on revision to this number to 6 months.)

Ms. Hurst asked if our current staffing ratios will maintain our 5-star rating. Ms. Benson stated that they ran the staffing numbers through the Payroll Based Journal (PBJ) reports and we will maintain our five-star rating even with our staffing right-sizing.

Ms. Bennett reported the following regarding COVID vaccinations to date:

- Full time staff – 125 of 143 are vaccinated, 87%
- Part time staff – 81 of 125 are vaccinated, 65%
- 8 Nursing staff members are not vaccinated, the majority are CNA’s; greater than 90% of nurses are vaccinated
- Dietary – 9 unvaccinated, all part time staff (majority are evening and/or weekend staff)
- Thus far, no one has stated religious objections as reason for declining the vaccine

**Building Committee Report - presented by Larry Vanterpool**

Mr. Vanterpool reported the following:

**The Pavilion External Renovations** – This project is now 75% complete. In replacing the wood on the 1st floor deck, some unexpected structural damage was discovered that needed to be replaced/repaiired. A change order was processed for a cost of approximately $8K. The contractor asked for a weeks’ extension to the original completion date, bringing the date of project completion to August 9, 2021, which Messrs. Hopper and Vanterpool approved. There were some design challenges concerning the height of the railings to preserve the historic look of the building which all have been resolved.

**Tower Electrical Panel upgrade** – The parts have been ordered and are scheduled for delivery in early October 2021. Once the parts are in the building, we will coordinate the internal shutdown plan.

Ms. Benson corrected a statement she made during her report: The probationary period for both Teamster and LIUNA employees is six (6) months, not 24 months.

**Finance Report – presented by Nunzio Raimo**

Mr. Raimo reviewed the Financial Statement and Operating Results for the twelve months ending June 30, 2021:
- NW Census by payer class for June 2021: total days billed were 5,153. April 2020 was the only month with 30 days that exceeded June 2020.
- Occupancy Percentage for June 2021 was 85%, and for the year averaged about 81%; average beds per day for June 2021 was 171.8.
- Revenue by Payer Class: June revenue from operations was $2,285,880. Private pay was budgeted at 26% but was actually 27% of revenue for June 2021.
- Two efficiency metrics were highlighted: 1.) Monthly revenue per FTE (which is an indicator of staffing efficiency) for June 2021 was $9,344; 2.) Revenue per billable patient day (which shows the efficiency of our revenue stream from operations) for June 2021 was $444.00.
- Revenue June YTD Actual was $24,638,720, compared to budget of $28,272,000, resulting in a negative variance of $3,633,280.
- Expenses from Operations for June 2021 YTD Actual were $21,305,448 compared to budget of $22,867,577, resulting in a positive savings year to date of $1,562,129.
- June 2021 YTD Margin Before Debt & Allocation of $3,333,272, $2M under Budget.
- June 2021 YTD Margin Before Debt & Capital was ($2,433,384), compared to our budget of ($666,368), resulting in a variance of ($1,767,016). Actual Capital Expenditures were $452,627. Operating Profit before Debt Service was (635,002), with a positive variance of $664,366.
- Net Revenues/(Expenses) are ($968,633). Mr. Simon noted that it is commendable that we beat our projection by $665K, considering this was a COVID year.
- Mr. Raimo reported that we came in under budget in every expense category.
- Benefit Summary for YTD June 2021 variance to budget was a savings of $298,966.
- For June YTD 2021 Salaries & Wages were under budget by $1,105,858. Mr. Raimo attributes this to right sizing of staff and good management of overtime.
- For June YTD 2021 OTPS were $665,042 under budget.
- For June YTD 2021 Supplies & Materials were below budget by $321,766.
- For June YTD 2021 Maintenance expenditures were under budget by $71,288.
- Overall Gain/(Loss) Fiscal Year to date at ($3.2M); after COVID money at ($968,633).
- Mr. Raimo reported that Census is running at 178 so far for July 2021, which would put us in the best month of the entire prior fiscal year. Our expected Revenue is $2.4M. We have been reaching the low to mid-180’s with a goal of 188.

Mr. Simon stated that as of July 1 we have received a Medicaid rate increase of 10% for the next 9 months. With 60% Medicaid Census, it is the equivalent of 120 patients. With a 10% increase in the rate, that is the equivalent of having another 12 people, which brings us over the 188 number and brings us very close to running on budget for August, if not July. Mr. Simon noted the favorable payer mix and the number of admissions has been very high. We have 146 long-term patients and have been running at 37/39 short-term.

Ms. Gibbons asked if upon admission, are we collecting information about how patients are coming to us and where they have heard of us? If so, how are we tracking that type of information? Mr. Mastronardi confirmed that we do track that information. It has been a manual process in the past and using PatientPing will help us do a more effective job of tracking those patients, while they are with us here and also post discharge.
Mr. Simon noted that the financial reports show $60K less than budget was spent in advertising this past year. Mr. Carter does not believe the final payment has been made for the new website development. He stated that once all the charges are in for the new website, we can start the new fiscal year working with Harrison Edwards to determine what other ideas we could be working on from a marketing perspective.

**Marketing – presented by Christopher Carter**

Mr. Carter reported the following:

We have 1 week left on our geofencing ad campaign with Today Media. With the latest update we have had over 170K impressions and 541 visits to the website. During the first flight of our campaign we had some good engagement with Montefiore and St. Joseph’s Medical Center. The second flight had good engagement from St. John’s Riverside and Burke Rehabilitation. Mr. Carter will have the full report from the entire campaign at the September Board meeting.

We continue to concentrate ad dollars on the Google pay per click ads and Facebook ads.

There have been no print ads over the summer but we will run some skilled nursing ads again in September with half-pages in Greenwich and Stamford magazines, and ads in the Greenwich Times and Stamford Advocate.

Google ads created nearly 5,000 visits to our website.

There were 17 Facebook posts since the last Board meeting, including talk about past volunteers coming back into the building, i.e. the United Way Teens Car Parade, our news team, fitness professional, and musical entertainers.

We had over 10K impressions of our Facebook posts and 300 watchers of the virtual tour on the website come in via Facebook.

The website is fully up and operational and is continually updated to reflect the latest COVID information.

Two new blogs are being posted, one on the Culinary Wellness Garden, with input from Board Member Suzanne Brown, and a second on how summer heat can impact older adults.

There was an article in the Greenwich time that spotlighted how a bride held her wedding on the Witherell’s grounds so her 99-year old grandmother could be part of this day. The article described how the staff went above and beyond to help the bride and her grandmother arrange and enjoy this special day.

**Therapeutic Recreation – presented by Carissa Ronish**

Ms. Ronish reported the following regarding Resident Life activity:
We continue to slowly & safely re-introduce pre-COVID activities in a larger group setting. Activities that have resumed in the Auditorium include: Concerts, crafts (most recently tie dyeing and jewelry making), ice cream socials—the ice cream truck was here last Wednesday and was a big hit with residents and staff. Thank you to the Brennan family for that event. We have also resumed our weekly bingo games and monthly birthday parties. Sporting events are shown on the big screen TV including baseball, tennis and the Olympic Games.

Future considerations include planning community outings, our “pooches on parade” event made possible by volunteers, and the return of the Bob Button Orchestra on Saturdays. We will also reconnect with schools in the community for intergenerational programs such as a Halloween parade, holiday concerts and story-telling.

Most recently we have had community involvement from Greenwich Junior United Way providing a car parade on the property, hand-made cards delivered by Cos Cob library, and a puzzle donation from the Boys & Girls Club.

Volunteers are back assisting with transport to and from activities, bringing residents outdoors for fresh air and providing 1:1 help for those who need support in programs such as bingo, art, and card games. We have had several volunteers return and new volunteers from local high schools.

We are planning to hold 2 outdoor BBQs in September as a farewell to summer event. These have been missed by all and will be a nice way to close out the summer months.

Our activity schedule along with the monthly newsletter can be found on the Nathaniel Witherell website under the tab “Events & Newsletters.”

The guidance is for residents who are not vaccinated to continue to wear masks, which is universal in the building, and to maintain distancing, which we also do in general. We also try to be as discreet as possible to not impinge on anyone’s right to privacy regarding vaccination status.

To Ms. Gibbons question regarding communal dining, Ms. Benson stated that we have been having communal dining on the floors for months now while adhering to social distancing protocols.

**Friends of Nathaniel Witherell (FNW) – presented by Scott Neff**

Mr. Neff reported the FNW Community Appeal concluded along with the Friends fiscal year on June 30, 2021. The Community Appeal received donations from 447 donors and exceeded last years’ contributions by 20%.

Mr. Neff extended his thanks to the Brennan Family who funded this year’s ice cream social with a donation through the FNW which they have been doing for several years.
FNW continues to help with support of resident related activities, whether it is for special concerts or other programs related to support of the volunteer services.

**Chairman’s Discussion – presented by Laurence Simon**

Mr. Simon stated that census is increasing, admissions are increasing, more and more recreational activities are back and continue to be added. Slowly but surely, we are returning to some degree of normalcy, although we are still faced with many challenges. We need to continue to improve our level of care to our residents.

Mr. Simon reported that he has engaged Joanne Kotulski, Interim Administrator at the Witherell before Mr. Mastronardi, for two weeks in August to evaluate and train the nursing staff. We look to find ways to continue to upgrade and improve our medical care so that, as we take more complex patients, we are able to take care of them and have the right medical specialists available to give us the support we need.

Mr. Simon stated that he is very encouraged that we continue to look at ways in which we may refine the quality of our operations and find ways to be more cost effective.

Mr. Andy Duus, BET Liaison to The Nathaniel Witherell, stated that these were very nice numbers to finish the fiscal year on. He was pleased to see the improvement in performance, and he thanked everyone for putting in the hard work this past year. He expressed that he was very pleased that even with the challenges we faced from COVID, that we have come so close to budget. He stated that they were all very appreciative of the hard work and results.

Mr. Simon spoke regarding the RFP:
- The RFP process is still ongoing, and no selection has been made yet as to what might be the best candidate.
- Mr. Simon is still waiting on a legal opinion from the Town Attorney on the Board of Director’s role in the decision-making process. Mr. Simon believes the Board has the full legal authority to make all decisions for Witherell.

**Mandatory staff vaccination** – Mr. Simon would like to propose to set September 30, 2021 as a deadline for all staff to be vaccinated (unless they have a medical condition or religious exemption or have previously had COVID). If a staff member refuses to be vaccinated their employment will be terminated.

Ms. Benson asked if weekly testing of unvaccinated staff could be an option. If we terminate staff who refuse to be vaccinated, our staffing will be strongly impacted, and we are already dealing with a staffing crisis. What interventions can we put in place to make sure we can replace staff that refuse the vaccine?

Mr. Kaplan suggested some staff may not working currently because they do not want to be around unvaccinated staff. If we mandate the staff to be vaccinated, perhaps these staff would come/return to the Witherell.
Ms. Gibbons questioned whether we should wait until the vaccine has full FDA approval to implement the mandate. She noted that vaccinated people are also contracting the delta variant of the virus; vaccination does not keep anyone entirely safe. What will the protocols be in terms of testing with the delta variant? Ms. Benson explained that there will be the same protocol in place that we have right now. There is nothing to suggest that it should be anything different than the current CDC and DPH guidance.

Mr. Kaplan stated that it could be another 6 months before the FDA gives full approval of the vaccine.

If we issue a vaccine mandate, Ms. Benson believes we could lose 25% (4-5 full time staff members) of the staff that are currently unvaccinated.

Mr. Vanterpool expressed his concern about this mandate with relation to our support services. Dietary, Housekeeping and Maintenance have been experiencing hardship in hiring. If we consider this mandate, it will put an extra burden on those departments that have high numbers of unvaccinated staff. The hiring difficulties we are already experiencing are starting to have an impact on how we deliver support services for the nursing department.

Mr. Mastronardi stated that if we are going to commit to a mandate, we need a contingency plan as a fallback for staffing.

Ms. Hurst asked if our administration would support a vaccine mandate: Mr. Mastronardi said yes, he would support the mandate with a proper contingency plan in place; Ms. Benson said no, not without knowing how it would affect staffing; she may reconsider with the proper staffing contingency plan in place.

Ms. Gibbons suggested instituting the policy once the vaccine was fully approved. Ms. Benson believes that would increase the number of staff willing to be vaccinated.

A motion to mandate the COVID vaccine for staff, working along with Administration, NW Board and the Town to develop a policy with appropriate exemptions, was made by Mr. Simon, and seconded by Mr. Kaplan. A vote was taken, and the motion was approved by a vote of 6-0-1 (Ms. Hurst abstained).

**New Business - none**

A motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:47 PM was made by Mr. Simon, seconded by Mr. Carter and approved by a vote of 7-0-0.

The next meeting of the Board of Directors is scheduled for Monday, September 13, 2021 at 5:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Linda Marini
August 2, 2021