



PUTNAM COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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A PHAB-ACCREDITED HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Public Health Summit VIII Draws Crowd to PHC;
Collecting Data Begins with “Forces of Change” Assessment

BREWSTER, NY— More than 85 public health partners from nearly four dozen community agencies convened at Putnam Hospital Center (PHC) last Thursday, October 18, for the eighth annual public health summit. This year for the first time, a broad effort was made to invite public participation through social media and nearly 20 Putnam residents were also in attendance. Organized by the Putnam County Department of Health with support from Putnam Hospital Center, the event kicked off the data collection process for formulating the next community health improvement plan, known as the “CHIP.”

County Executive MaryEllen Odell, Putnam Hospital Center President Peter Kelly, interim Health Commissioner Michael Nesheiwat, MD, Commissioner Michael Piazza and Deputy Commissioner Joseph DeMarzo of the Department of Social Services and Mental Health, and County Legislator Barbara Scuccimarra, chairperson for the Health, Social, Educational and Environmental committee, were among the community leaders in attendance.

County Executive MaryEllen Odell thanked Putnam Hospital Center for its support, saying “This hospital is the heart and soul of our community. Many of us were born here, and had children here. Many also say their final farewells here.” She went on to applaud the hospital’s efforts during the last storm event, when 90 percent of the county was out of power.

“All roads led to this center. It was a critical point in getting our county through the crisis,” continued County Executive MaryEllen Odell.

Dr. Nesheiwat welcomed and thanked the attendees, saying “Today’s program examines the ‘forces of change’ that are at work in our community. Your participation plays an instrumental role not only in planning ways to improve population health, but also in the strategic planning for the health department.”

Stephanie Marquesano opened the morning session of presentations by community partners. She is founder and president of the harris project, a unique nonprofit organization committed to co-occurring disorders (COD), a diagnosis of one or more mental health challenges together with substance misuse. She launched the organization after her 19-year-old son Harris died of an accidental overdose, after struggling with COD in a public health system that lacks the cohesiveness to properly address these dual conditions.

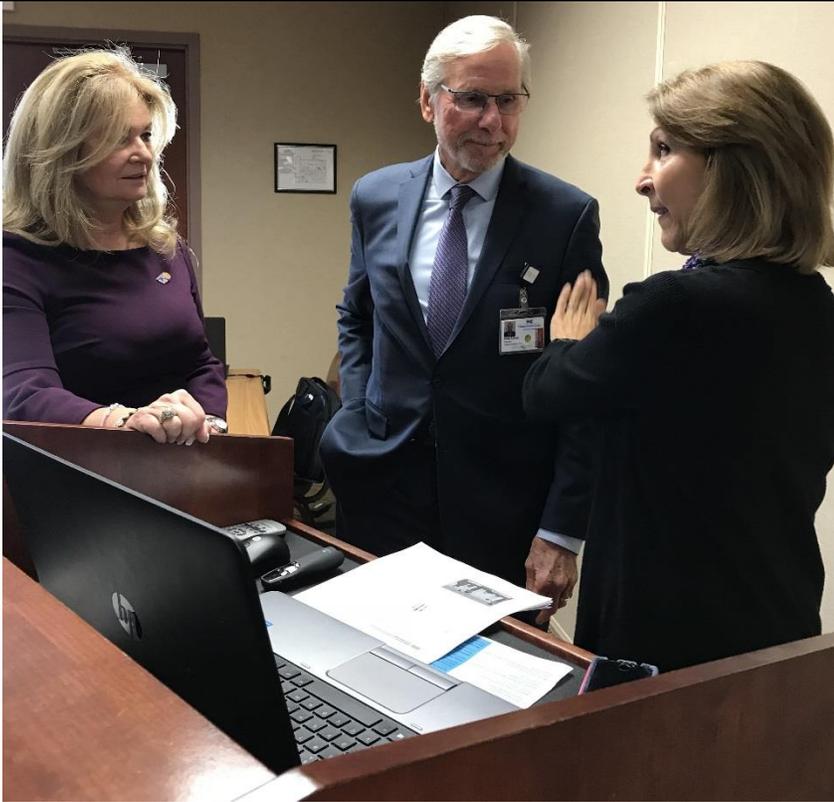
The significance of this fractured health care system and the challenges communities face when trying to fix it was described by presenter Ashley Brody, MPA, chief executive officer of Search for Change. His organization, which has received funding and licensure from the NYS Office of Mental Health for over 40 years, has been on the front lines of providing housing and other support for individuals who are faced with emotional, social and economic barriers. He pointed to their historical “abstinence only” orientation to substance use disorders, and the slow, uneven progress toward harm reduction and other alternate approaches. To transform to a more people-oriented care approach, the first step is to recognize that co-occurring issues and conditions are the norm—not the exception, and that recovery occurs through adequately supported, individualized and concurrent, skill-based learning for all conditions.

Other partner updates came from Kristin McConnell, director of the Prevention Council of Putnam, a local substance abuse prevention provider, who spoke about the history, implications and lessons learned regarding the Tobacco 21 Legislation. The legislation limits

sales of tobacco products to individuals under 21 years of age, and includes electronic nicotine delivery systems products, commonly known as “vapes.” Sarena Chisick, community health educator at the hospital, presented on the recent Falls Prevention Expo at PHC and the ongoing efforts of the Falls Prevention Task Force, created to focus on the latest CHIP priority of reducing injuries caused by falls.

The “forces of change” assessment that followed was a fast-moving discussion on a variety of factors including social, economic, political, technological, scientific, ethical, legal and environmental that may affect the county and the country at large. Political trends were more in the spotlight this year with audience members mentioning the possible dismantling of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), potential legalization of marijuana for recreational use and the weakened regulation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Other social and scientific or technical trends that were named included the continued prevalence of sexual and domestic violence, the dramatically rising rates of sexually transmitted diseases, increase and prevalence of cancer, and growing number of patients with Alzheimer’s disease and dementia. Identified trends were all discussed in terms of threats and opportunities for change. A full report of the Forces of Change assessment will be drafted and posted on the health department’s website

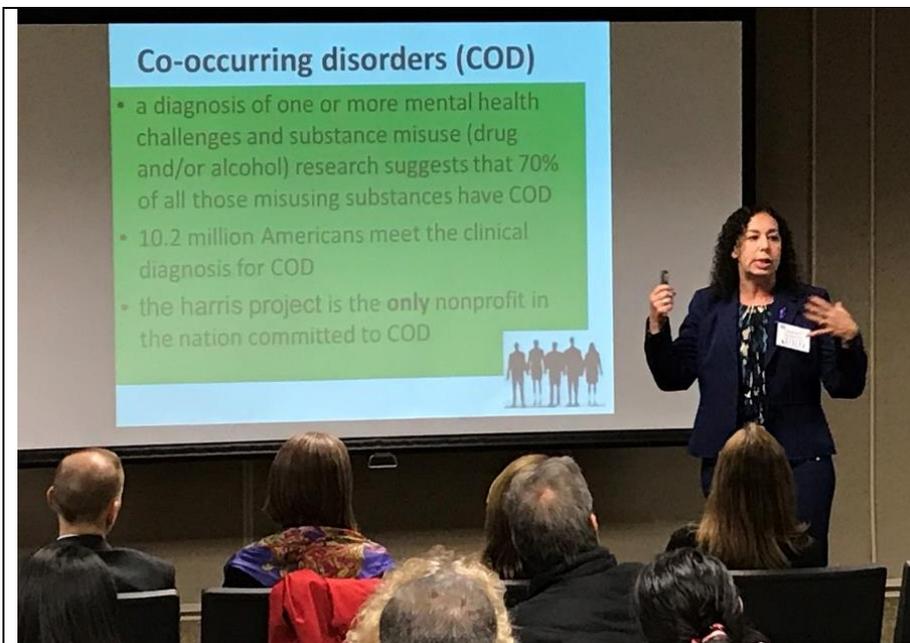
The mission of the Putnam County Department of Health, nationally accredited by the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB), is to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community, composed of nearly 100,000 residents. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, emergency preparedness, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit our County website at www.putnamcountyny.com; or visit our social media sites on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.



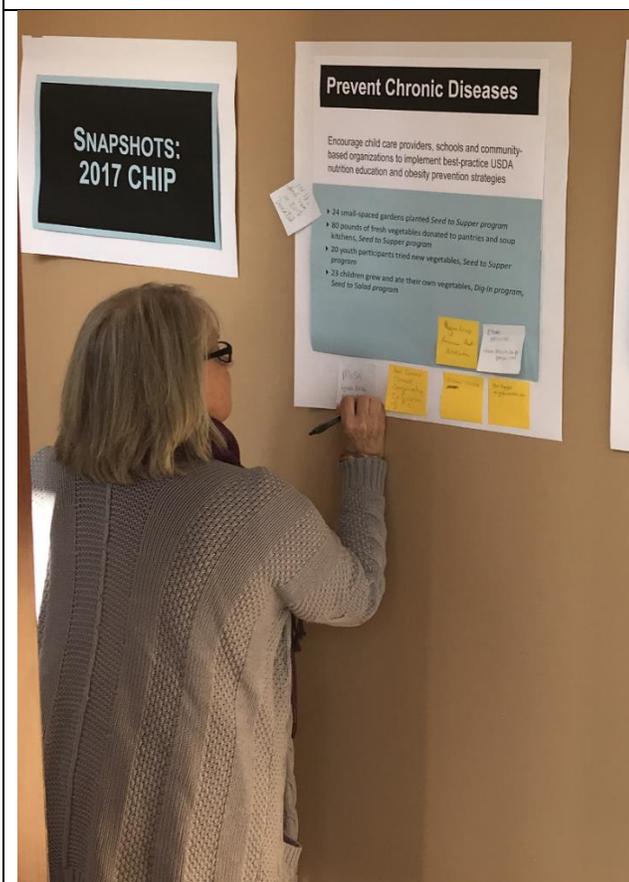
County Executive MaryEllen Odell, left, Putnam Hospital President Peter Kelly and Public Health Summit moderator Barbara Ilardi from the Putnam County Department of Health discuss the morning agenda.



From left, Joseph DeMarzo, deputy commissioner of social services and mental health, County Legislator Barbara Scuccimarra, and interim Health Commissioner Michael J. Nesheiwat, MD, were among the county leaders in attendance.



Stephanie Marquesano, founder and president of the harris project, discussed the high numbers of individuals who have a diagnosed mental health challenge along with a substance misuse disorder. More than 10.2 million Americans meet this description and the health care system is currently not structured to provide integrated care for the two conditions.



Participants such as Lynda Brady from MiSN, the community-based non-profit network dedicated to family and community health and wellness, were encouraged to post their organizations' current priorities and areas of interest for supporting the community health improvement plan, known simply as the "CHIP."



Community partners who participated in Public Health Summit VIII included presenter Kristin McConnell, director of the Prevention Council of Putnam, left, and Janeen Cunningham, director of the Putnam County Youth Bureau.



Other community partners who participated in Public Health Summit VIII included from left, Didi Raxworthy, director of Center for Tobacco Free-Hudson Valley; and co-chairs of the Suicide Prevention Task Force Megan Castellano, executive director of The Mental Health Association in Putnam County, and Marla Behler, program coordinator for the Child Advocacy Center of Putnam County.