

## Agency representatives work toward local health goals

Posted: Tuesday, October 8, 2013 10:29 am By TEDDYE SNELL, Staff Writer Tahlequah Daily Press



Sarah Johnson, Turning Point consultant for the Oklahoma State Department of Health, visited with representatives of local agencies Monday to create a community health improvement plan.

When it comes to public health in a community, the first thing that generally comes to mind is the local health department.

But setting overall goals for community health involves the cooperation of and communication among a variety of entities – including direct-care physicians, hospitals, clinics, schools, community coalitions, local officials, nursing homes, corrections, fire and police departments and nonprofit organizations.

Twenty-eight members of a number of these agencies gathered Monday to participate in the first of four training sessions to establish health performance standards for Cherokee County.

“We’re here today to assess our public health system and its performance,” said Brandi Larmon, administrative programs officer with the Oklahoma State Department of Health. “It’s difficult for many people to grasp that public health is so much more than the health department. We’re here to encourage everyone to remember that.”

The group will ultimately identify 10 essential services provided in the community, assess those services and how Cherokee County functions in providing them.

“The end result of the training is to create a community health improvement plan,” said Larmon. “We’ll arrive at health goals that are specific to this community.”

Sarah Johnson, Turning Point consultant for the Oklahoma State Department of Health, conducted Monday’s session, which began with the group discussing what is already available in the community and how well the information is shared.

Questions on which the group voted included:

- At what level does the local public health system conduct regular community health assessments?
- At what level does the local public health system continuously update the community health assessment with current information?
- At what level does the local public health system promote the use of the community health assessment among community members and partners?

The majority of the participants agreed that more communication among entities is essential, but that assessment data is readily available.

“One of our community’s strengths is that lots of organizations conduct assessments,” said Dr. David Gahn, commander for the U.S. Public Health Service at Cherokee Nation Hastings Hospital. “Our weakness would be sharing that data.” Karen Sherwood, community health program coordinator at the Cherokee County Health Department, said this area is very unique in its diversity.

“We pull from federal, state and tribal agencies,” said Sherwood.

Louise Micolites, regional Turning Point consultant for OSDH, believes communication will be key to attaining the goal of creating a health improvement plan.

“If someone asks for data from another agency, it’s shared,” said Micolites. “We have no problem in sharing data, it’s just knowing the research is being done and that the data is available. You don’t know to ask for it.”

Johnson asked the group to comment on the availability of maps, charts and graphs with health information specific to the area.

Elizabeth Montgomery-Anderson, of Cherokee Nation’s GeoData group, said they create those very items for use in the community.

“We use U.S. Census data and tie it to county data, and can break things down in a very specific way,” said Montgomery-Anderson. “For instance, we can take a table of addresses and put them down to show the distribution of those points on a map from ground level. We did this for the walkability study for the schools recently. We’ve also provided this sort of information to the Food Policy Council.”

Montgomery-Anderson pointed out her group can create mapping for just about entity requesting it.

“It will be easier, of course, when the government is working again,” said Montgomery-Anderson.

[tsnell@tahlequahdailypress.com](mailto:tsnell@tahlequahdailypress.com)