**Community Board 17**

**Social Services Committee Virtual Meeting**

**Wednesday, March 2, 2022**

**Present: Guests:**

Janice Reid Leslie Sierra,

Michelle Griffith NY State Wide Senior Action Council

Diana Gay Kennard Phillip

Muline Mickle Chanelle Coto

Monica McKain-Brown Zabiga Witherspoon

Sabine Jacques Daniella Maxius

Keyson Gordan

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The **Social Services Committee** Virtual meeting was held on **Wednesday, March 2, 2022 at 7:30pm.**

**Ms. Janice Reid** called the March 2, 2022 meeting to order at 7:40pm.

**Roll Call**-Janice Reid, Michelle Griffith, Diana Gay, Muline Mickle, Monica McKain-Brown

**Guests**-Daniella Maxius, Chanelle Cato, Kennard Phillip, Keyron Gordan, Zakiya Witherspoon, Sabine Jacques

**Ms. Reid** said the guest for tonight is Ms. Leslie Sierra, the Community Outreach Counselor for the NY Statewide Senior Action Counsel and Medicare Fraud. She will give an overview on how to protect, detect and report fraud errors and abuse.

**Ms. Leslie Sierra** said she is from the NY Statewide Senior Action Counsel and they are an advocacy group for all things health for seniors. They are the mandated reporters of Medicare fraud in the State of New York, for people having issues with their Medicare. They get Medicare after 65 years or they are disabled. That is health insurance for seniors, as well as people with disabilities or are disabled for a length of time. They have offices around the State, up to the borders of Canada.

The NY State Senior Action Counsel is a grassroots membership organization made up of individual senior citizens, senior citizen clubs and organizations from all parts of New York. Statewide has a strong history of providing outreach and education to senior citizens and their families since 1972. Statewide is governed and directed by seniors and advocates for seniors on a grassroots level.

NY Statewide Senior Action Counsel has a patient’s rights helpline to help people who are in the hospital, nursing homes or **(INAUDIBLE)** nursing facilities or assisted living. They also have an MCCAP program, which is Managed Care Counseling and Assistance Program. From October through December, there was an open enrollment for people on Medicare and getting people to choose and understand how their healthcare works and also helping seniors pick which managed care program they would like to be in.

NY Senior Medicare Patrol program deals with Medicare fraud. The SMP mission is to empower and assist Medicare beneficiaries and their families and caregivers to prevent, detect and report healthcare fraud, errors and abuse through outreach, counselling and education. They have no idea how big Medicare fraud can be and this is something seniors need to be educated on.

Medicare fraud is intentionally billing for services that were not received or billing for services at a higher rate than is actually justified. There are several types of Medicare fraud, ambulance fraud, COVID-19 fraud, was extremely big during the height of COVID-19, durable medical equipment such as back and neck braces, wheelchairs, hospital beds and things of that nature, nursing home care, outpatient mental health care, pharmacy and prescription drug fraud. They don’t realize how important it is to count their meds when they receive them to make sure they are getting what they are paying for.

Medical identity theft, which goes right along with regular identity theft and they don’t want people getting their medical identity and using that. Telehealth has increased 4,000% since the beginning of the pandemic and telehealth fraud is also a big thing, since they can see their doctors on their devices. To protect yourself from Medicare fraud, don’t give out Medicare number, except to your doctor or Medicare provider. Just to know, Medicare, Social Security or the IRS will never call them at home, but they will send them a letter. If they receive these calls, just hang up the phone. Do not carry their Medicare with them, unless they will need it and don’t click on links that they do not know. Treat their Medicare number like a credit card. Be cautious of offers for free medical services.

Examples of Medicare fraud are billing for services or supplies and equipment that were not provided, billing for excessive medical supplies, obtaining or giving Medicare numbers for free services, improper coding to obtain a higher payment, unneeded or excessive x-rays and lab tests, claims for services that are not medically necessary, using another person’s Medicare number or letting someone else use their number. It is not a good idea because everyone can get in trouble.

To detect Medicare fraud and abuse, they have a healthcare tracker, which is good for people because it keeps track of their doctors, treatments and appointments. Not all seniors are computer savvy who want to go that route, they always try to remember not everybody is into computers and they want to have ways for them to keep up with their healthcare. When they start receiving Medicare, they will receive Medicare Summary Notices every 3 months, which is a summary of the services they used in the prior months. For those with Medicare Advantage Plans, they will get an Explanation of Benefits every month. They explain the services that were provided to them during that month, whether they were in the hospital, went to the doctor, got meds, went to see a specialist or had lab work done. They want to scrutinize those statements for services they did not receive, for double billing or services that were not ordered by their doctor that they know nothing about. If they see any of those things on their Medicare Summary Notices or EOB, they can call the toll-free helpline at 800-333-4374. Medicare fraud is a big business in the borough of Brooklyn. They can also access their Medicare information online and if the parents live out of town, they can set up an account at Medicare.gov to keep up with their healthcare. They can also call if they want to get the free healthcare tracker, call the helpline and they will get one out to them.

If they want to report suspected Medicare fraud and abuse, they can contact them at NY Statewide Senior Action Counsel at 800-333-4374. They will assist them and lead them to the right people.

Looking at COVID-19, they may be getting pass this after 2 years and everyone just needs to be aware, smart and savvy and doing the things they were doing before COVID-19. The vaccines are safe and all people are eligible to receive all the shots. Individuals 5 years of age and older that reside in New York are eligible to receive the Pfizer vaccines and individuals 12 years and older are eligible for the Pfizer booster. Vaccines are available at pharmacies, hospitals and local health departments and federally qualified health centers. They can get vaccines if they are homebound by calling 877-829-4692 to set up an appointment.

Do not buy fake vaccine cards or make their own and don’t fill in blank vaccination record cards with false information. It is against the law to falsify that information. Do not share photos of your vaccination cards on social media because it gives away their private information that they don’t want people having. Watch out for COVID-19 vaccine surveys, they are being used to steal their personal information. Legitimate surveys will not offer you money, gifts or rewards and do not include an urgency that they have to take the survey now. Never give out personal information such as your bank account or credit card numbers to people they don’t know. If they get links on their computers or smart phones that are long and suspicious, don’t click on them.

She heard that contact tracing is about to be over next month. If they are contacted by a contact tracer, they will not ask for money, bank account or credit card numbers, immigration status, social security or Medicare numbers. Contact tracers should be just trying to find out who they have been in contact with to let them know they may have been in contact with COVID-19. Contact tracers may ask for their name, address and date of birth, whereabouts on certain dates and questions about their health or whether they have experienced COVID-19 symptoms.

Scammers are selling fake, unauthorized at-home COVID-19 test kits and setting up fraudulent test sites in an effort to get their personal, financial or medical information. Make sure they purchase FDA approved COVID-19 test kits from legitimate providers. If they are not sure the kit is legitimate, contact their doctor or local pharmacy. If they go to a pop-up site or other testing facilities, research the facility or testing site before they go. Contact their local health department to find out if it is a legitimate site. Some people are setting up COVID-19 test sites just to get their information and they will never hear from them whether their test was negative or positive. Just be mindful of the places they go to get tested. Ignore offers or advertising for COVID-19 testing or treatment on social media sites.

In 2020, Telehealth had a 6,000% increase. Telehealth is on their mobile devices, telephone or computer at home and this when they talk to their doctor over these devices and they actually have a visit with them. Be sure to call your provider to schedule your Telehealth appointment. Do not let anyone call you and tell you they scheduled an appointment for you. Guard your Medicare card and do not give your Medicare number to anyone other than your doctor or healthcare provider. Make sure to review your Medicare statements to see if you have been charged for any telehealth services you did not receive or schedule.

What does Medicare cover in relationship to COVID-19? FDA authorized and approved COVID-19 vaccines, they will not pay a deductible or copayment. If they go to these urgent care places, they will pay and sometimes really high prices. Be mindful that there are other places to go and get tested for free. Over the counter COVID-19 tests, they should be receiving them in Spring 2022. People with original Medicare will be able to go to a network of pharmacies or healthcare facility to get 8 free over the counter tests a month. If they have a Medicare Advantage plan, contact your plan regarding this benefit. All medically necessary hospitalizations and this includes if they are diagnosed with COVID-19 and might otherwise had been discharged from the hospital after an inpatient stay, but instead they needed to stay in the hospital under quarantine. You will still pay any hospital deductibles, copays or coinsurances that may apply.

If they would like to be a volunteer with the Senior Medicare Patrol program, please give them a call at 800-333-4374. They are getting out and people are starting to meet in person again and they still do virtual meetings.

Please contact Statewide if they have any Medicare fraud issues, need help on the patient helpline, need information or assistance with Medicare or billing, if they think they can get a better Medicare plan or would like to know how to get a better Medicare plan, give them a call. All the services are free, and they do not work for any particular health insurance programs. They just want them to have the information to make good decisions for themselves and family.

She thanked them for taking time out of their schedules to listen and allowing her to share. The website is [www.nysenior.org](http://www.nysenior.org) and there is a lot of information there on what is going on legislatively for seniors, what is happening and what they are fighting for, what is or not going to be in the budget. She will send the newsletter to be shared with the other members.

**Ms. Reid** thanked Ms. Sierra for such thorough presentation on the program. It was mentioned that Brooklyn has the highest numbers of Medicare fraud, where is that.

**Ms. Sierra** said the highest numbers are in Sheepshead Bay.

**Ms. Reid** said they do not have a quorum to approve the minutes, so they will approve them at the April meeting.

**Chairperson’s Report**

**Ms. Reid** said she attended the OBH Brookdale CAB virtual meeting on Monday, February 7, 2022. There was a presentation on Healthy Families. It is a home visiting program that serves parents who are pregnant and serves the family until the child is 5 years old. The parent must be under 21 years of age, unmarried and live in the NYC target area and their finances have to be unstable, meaning the person needs some kind of assistance. The program spoke of supporting the family, child development and parent/child relationships. The program is grant funded and has the capacity to serve 300 families. They will have to get referrals from both Kings County and Downstate Hospitals in order to go to the program at Brookdale Hospital.

There was also a bariatric and metabolic **(INAUDIBLE)** Farmer’s Market that they are partnered with Stella’s Farm and that was held on Tuesday, February 8th and it was a virtual workshop.

The Kings County **(INAUDIBLE)** Dept. in partnership with the FDNY Fire Safety Education Unit held a virtual fire safety webinar, on Wednesday, February 23rd.

She attended the 2nd of 4 webinars that were held for Black History Month. The webinar was on mental health in the black community and was titled, the Impact of the Two Pandemics, COVID-19 and Racism, Managing Chronic Health Issues and Loss, Grief and Trauma and was held on Saturday, February 12th. It was an excellent program that addressed the challenges of providing mental health to those in the black community, the disparities and unavailability of services. This was a 4-part series and she was only able to attend 1 of the 4, due to other commitments.

She also attended the Health Fair Virtual Symposium on Racism and Health, held on February 8th. It was a 2-hour symposium that addressed the relationship between racism and health.

For the members that attended the December meeting, Ms. Monica Siergiej attended the meeting seeking a letter of support to open a substance abuse clinic, called Under Angel Wings Practice. She also presented at the Board meeting on February 16th, 2022. The matter was tabled and there was no motion to vote on until another location was secured. Ms. Siergiej was unable to secure the Church Avenue location. It was recommended that she obtain more accurate data, also in terms of assessment pertaining to those living in the community with substance abuse. There were concerns raised about the administration and management of **(INAUDIBLE)** which is a medication used to treat narcotic dependency and also the qualifications of those who were to be hired to run the facility. Keep in mind, there are other facilities in the area that treat substance abuse and not try to over saturate. Ms. Siergiej has since reached out to her requesting a letter of acknowledgement for the presentations that she gave on Dec. 1st and Feb. 16th and she told her this would have to be brought to the Executive Board on March 7th for discussion because the Board would have to approve it. She will give an update at the April meeting if that was agreed upon.

Regarding the health fair, the permit request is still pending for the outdoor health fair at Paerdegat Park, to be held on June 11th from 10am to 3pm. The committee was approved by the Board to receive discretionary funds in the amount of $1,500.00 to support the event. The funds have to be spent on items, excluding food. They need to decide on how they want to use the money on purchased items they want to provide for the event, whether it is decorations, tee shirts, tote bags, etc. At the last meeting, some members volunteered to be on the subcommittee and she will be reaching out to those on the subcommittee, Mr. Tait, Ms. Griffith, Ms. McKain-Brown, Ms. Gay and Ms. Mickle because the event is 3 months away. She will schedule a virtual planning meeting outside of this meeting, based on their availability. They need to start securing persons who would like a table at the event, the community hospitals, vendors, etc. She will be in touch with the members of the subcommittee before the next meeting to discuss the planning and they want to spend the money. Are there any ideas on how they want to spend the discretionary funds?

**Ms. Monica McKain-Brown** said at the last meeting, Mr. Tait had mentioned having testing and getting materials, which most are free, and the money should be spent on supplies.

**Ms. Reid** said they got a donation of PPE supplies, face shields, masks and hand sanitizer and there is enough to be shared with other committees having events. This was donated by the Dept. of Health.

They can purchase tee shirts for the members to wear that day to identify the members. They can get some tote bags for attendees to put the hand outs in that they get from the vendors. At the meeting, they can determine quantity and how much they want to purchase. They can purchase some balloons for decoration. Maybe they can have some water and other stuff donated for the participants. They can brainstorm on what they want to do in terms of organizing themselves and getting things finalized between now and then.

SUNY Downstate held their 7th Annual Cancer Health Disparity Symposium, virtually on Friday, March 4th from 8:30am to 3pm. The focus was on Colorectum GI Cancers. This was sponsored by SUNY Downstate HSU, called Spring Harbor Labs Northwell Health and also in collaboration with Brooklyn Health Disparities Center and Downstate Center for Community Health Promotional Wellness. The keynote speaker was Edith P. Mitchell, a Physician and Director of the Center to Eliminate Cancer Disparities. She is the program’s GI Oncology Leader.

She received a flyer from Ms. Griffith on the Kings County Hospital Ophthalmology Services, located at 451 Clarkson Avenue. The brochure describes the services offered by the Ophthalmology Dept. They have a wealth of ophthalmology services and they are fully equipped to manage the full spectrum of **(INAUDIBLE)** diseases and provide comprehensive eye care needed for persons in the community. They accept Medicare, Medicaid and private insurances.

**Ms. Michelle Griffith** said if they do not have insurance, they can go to public hospitals to get eye care. The Cardio Care is there for people who are not insured, and it does not prevent people from going to get care. People often go the Optometrists to get glasses and checkups and they are getting a full comprehensive eye check up when they do that. She thinks it is a conflict of interest when there is a store selling glasses and also giving checkups. They just want to sell glasses and they miss the glaucoma part. The community needs to be aware and go further in taking care of their eyes and that is available at this public hospital.

**Ms. Reid** in this community, glaucoma and high blood pressure is rampant and they need to make sure to get that checked, especially those over 65 years old.

**Ms. Sabine Jacques** said one of the big topics now is health disparities and inequities. A lot is being done with OBH and as these hospitals have gotten together, she would also like for them to be involved in these dialogs to see who the administrators are so this does not get lost, because there are a lot of changes and conversations going on in the communities.

**Ms. Reid** said when the OBH was being rolled out, they were involved and had community meetings and sessions about it. She is a part of the Brookdale CAB and she does try to bring to the committee any programs that she hears about and what is happening out there. She does know that the health disparities and inequities is a big topic that is out there. She will keep her ears open with the OBH in terms of Kingsbrook, Brookdale and Interfaith and she will keep them informed.

**Ms. Jacques** asked do they share with them how administrators are hired and how the administration is put together, do they live in the community and how often would an administrator come and talk to this group?

**Ms. Reid** said the CEO of One Brooklyn Health is an African American and some or most of the administrators are African American and there are 2 others that are not. During the merger, they did not have any input as to who those administrators were going to be because when hospitals merge, they retain those who are already in leadership. The merger went through in 2020. She is on the Brookdale CAB and the other hospitals do not have a CAB and the CAB is very much involved in what goes on in Brookdale and also in the other 2 institutions. They are kept informed of what goes on and the leadership at Brookdale do come to the CAB meetings and they do get to meet those that are leading Brookdale. Dr. Scott is the new CNO and she started out as the head of the Emergency Room and she does attend the meetings to keep them informed of what is going on within the Brookdale community. The other 2 hospitals do not have a CAB, so she does not know what happens in Interfaith and Kingsbrook. One of the Board members is on the Kings County CAB and Ms. Griffith is also on that CAB.

**Ms. Griffith** said she is on the Outreach Committee and their goal is to provide outreach to the community and also gather information from events and bring back information from the community to Kings County, so they are going to be working in both directions. They just started a Youth Committee with the CAB. There is an officer in the Dept. of Health that covers disparities.

**Ms. Reid** said they did have someone from the Dept. of Health that did a presentation on health disparities in the community at one of their meetings and they can always invite them back to have a discussion with them,

**Ms. Griffith** said they also covered care for women who had babies and for some reason, there is a higher mortality rate during the first year in certain communities in Brooklyn. She does not know where the State now on where they stand on that right now with the numbers.

**Ms. Reid** asked if there were any other issues to discuss? The next meeting will be held on April 6th at 7:30pm and the meeting information will be emailed. She asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting?

**Ms. McKain-Brown** made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:08pm.

**Ms. Griffith** seconded the motion.