

**ARKANSAS LEGISLATIVE TASK FORCE ON AUTISM**  
**MEETING**  
**AUGUST 19, 2011**

The Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism met Friday, August 19, 2011 at 1:00 p.m. in Room 130 at the State Capitol, Little Rock, Arkansas. Senator Mary Anne Salmon and Representative Uvalde Lindsey, Co-Chairs, presided.

Task Force members present were Senator Mary Anne Salmon, Representative Uvalde Lindsey, Ms. Leslie Henson-Kita, Ms. Sharon Moone-Jochums, Ms. Marjorie Greenberg, Ms. Christy Plunkett, Dr. Tyra Reid, Dr. Charles Green, Ms. Alice Jones sitting in for Mr. Jay Bradford, ex officio, Ms. Dianna Varady, Ms. Karan Burnette, Dr. Steve Kahler, Dr. Loretta Cochran, Ms. Martha Kay Asti, and Ms. Veronica Myers, ex officio.

Representative Lindsey opened the meeting. The minutes of the June 17, 2010, Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism meeting were approved by acclamation.

**Review of University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Program, First Connections**

Dr. Tyra Reed, Developmental Pediatrician, UAMS Department of Pediatrics, James L. Dennis Developmental Center, was recognized to give a report on UAMS Department of Pediatrics' (CoBALT) Project. Dr. Reid said the UAMS Dennis Developmental Center is not equipped to efficiently handle the volume of referrals they receive to diagnose a child with a developmental disability. The CoBALT Project was designed to improve efficiency of referrals so children with a developmental disability can receive early intervention services and eliminate additional diagnostic evaluations. She said a child does not have to be referred to the Diagnostic Center for a diagnosis of autism before the child can receive early intervention services. Dr. Reid said the program will help physicians around the state be aware that a diagnosis of developmental delay is needed for the child to receive early intervention services. Members of the diagnostic team hope to expand diagnostic capacity around the state for physicians who are interested in providing developmental assessments to children. Families will have access to physicians in their area who are knowledgeable about diagnosis and early intervention services.

Dr. Reid's handout explained the CoBALT trained teams of physicians are given the knowledge base, information about resources, and are introduced to program personnel for EI, EC, DDS and CMS. This training will facilitate direct network building among those entities, which should result in much more effective communication and treatment services. The program will enhance family support and education.

Dr. Reid said with additional funding, the Diagnostic Center can be a continual place to train physician teams, provide continual education of diagnostic consultation, and include Tele-Health services. She said the program is scheduled to have nine trained teams at the end of 2011. Three teams have been trained and are in the process of setting up clinics to receive referrals for assessment evaluations. The next onsite team training is October 2011. The First team is a group of physicians from Jonesboro and Eldorado. The second team of physicians are from Texarkana, Ft. Smith, and Helena-West Helena. So far all teams have come from areas with an AHEC. She said the Helena-West Helena and Eldorado AHEC sites are trying to expand throughout the delta so children with a disability can receive an evaluation. Dr. Reid hopes if physicians in the delta region receive training it will encourage them to expand their developmental support services.

Currently the program only includes physicians on the teams. She said if the program is financially maintained, it will be open to non-pediatricians such as APNs who are knowledgeable about developmental issues with an interest in expanding their diagnostic skills, early intervention referrals, and family support. She said currently all the teams include a Speech Pathologist.

Dr. Reid said the program has an online mechanism that teams can access for information from DDS on qualifications needed to receive early intervention services.

Representative Lindsey requested Dr. Reid provide a report at the October Autism meeting of a possible proposal in the UAMS budget to continue the CoBALT program.

Tonya Russell, Director, Division of Childcare and Early Childhood Education, Arkansas Department of Human Services was recognized. She said the department is working to serve children with developmental disabilities including autism. The American Reinvestment and Recovery Act can create opportunities for children to be served in all care environments. She's been working with Department of Education Special Education part C and DDS to continue that work in the state. She explained the SpecialQuest project provides responsive services using the SpecialQuest approach and materials to achieve successful professional development and system changes for inclusion of young children with disabilities and their families. There is a huge component of parent involvement, parent training and parent education as a part of the program. Her department works with DDS and the Department of Education trying to find resources that are available to post on the department's website that will help parents who are looking for information regarding special needs including autism.

Ms. Marjorie Greenberg would like to see emphasis on family and parental training and early intervention. She feels one of the barriers for parents is arranging baby-sitting care.

Dr. Steve Kahler would like to see the Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) therapy more available across the state.

Dr. Charlie Green said DDS applied for a waiver specific to ABA therapy. The funds available will only serve one hundred children. He feels the funding will encourage more providers to become ABA therapist which will increase funding for ABA therapy.

Ms. Karan Burnette said Partners is in the process of surveying ABA therapists around the state and neighboring states to add them to a data base that will assist providers when trying to hire ABA therapists. Partners is notifying therapists in bordering states to let them know Arkansas is starting a new program and polling them to see if they are interested in participating in the program. As soon as it is completed, the data base will coordinate a number of community meetings and invite legislators and community providers. The Providers Association is set to speak at the first meeting.

Ms. Dianna Varady said she was contacted by Autism Speaks and ABA to hold stakeholder meetings to provide information on where the trainings will be.

Ms. Martha Kay Asti said her department has a calendar on their ARlearn website which lists trainings that are available.

Senator Salmon said the state received \$3.1 billion dollars in stimulus funds; \$2.6 billion has been used. She would like to see those funds redistributed toward the CoBALT onsite team trainings.

## **Discussion of Department of Human Services Medicaid Reform**

Mr. Eugene Gessow, Director, Department of Human Services Medical Services, was recognized to explain his plan to transform the state's Medicaid program. He said the rate of growth of Arkansas Medicaid spending exceeds the rate of growth of Arkansas revenues. He is working on developing a more patient centered payment model which would focus on the needs of the individual not services provided, whereby curving Medicaid cost. His department is trying to identify the best way to get to the outcome, assemble the information, and act accordingly. One part of his strategy is to develop a set of tools and support services for both patients and providers that facilitate patient compliance and engagement. Mr. Gessow is looking to move Medicaid away from Fee-For-Service payment. The current system won't allow the state to improve quality and control costs as needed. He said Arkansas Medicaid has been able to hold off drastic changes with the help of Federal funding. With Federal contributions reduced to 33% , the state needs to examine more effective and efficient strategies to curve Medicaid cost. His office hopes to have the pilot going by July 2012.

Mr. Gessow explained two different types of patient-centered medical homes. Connect Care is a health home service designed for aged individuals who live independently in their homes and are assigned a primary care physician to coordinate their care. The Special needs medical home has not been implemented. With the Federal planning grant, his department is working on designing a medical home for individuals who have special needs whether short term or long term for chronically ill patients with high medical needs.

Mr. Gessow explained care coordination will be between the different healthcare providers. He feels quality care comes from making certain care coordination is included in the patient's cost. Electronic medical records and health information exchanges should be built into the standard of care.

Dr. Green said DD providers and DDS realized there are aspects of the health home model that would make DDS service provision better for people. DDS would like to get away from the Medicaid Fee-For-Service model and have good care coordination in health homes for individuals with disabilities. Care coordinators help cut down on the cost and number of trips disabled individuals take to the emergency room and hospital stays, which in turn cuts down on long term kidney and liver damage.

Ms. Burnette made the motion to elect Dr. Cheryl May to chair the Autism Task Force First Responders Subcommittee. Ms. Henson-Kita seconded the motion. Motion carried. Ms. Asti was asked to serve on the subcommittee or have someone in her department serve.

Representative Lindsey mentioned he and co-chair Senator Salmon have been discussing putting together an appropriation bill looking for revenue to fund certain programs.

Ms. Burnette gave an update on the autism waiver. CMS has issues with parameters of the program.

Meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.