

Date: November 16, 2016

To: Chair and Members of the Personnel and Finance Committee

From: Janel Heinrich, Director
Lesly Scott, PH Supervisor

Subject: Approval to hire Disease Intervention Specialist in Sexual and Reproductive Health

County Ordinance 29, 52(16) requires the Personnel and Finance Committee, along with the County Executive, to approve filling positions that are new or have been vacant longer than six months. I write to request approval to fill a 1.0 FTE Disease Intervention Specialist position. This position is in EG 720, range 14. We reclassified position #2695 (Communicable Disease Outreach Specialist, vacant since 2/2016) to create this new position. We have exceeded our vacancy savings goals for 2016.

What is the nature of the work or what is the essential function of the position?

Disease Intervention Specialists are the front line workers of sexually transmitted infection (STI) prevention responsible for counseling people with STIs and their sexual partners. PHMDC is mandated to follow up on all reportable sexually transmitted diseases. DIS workers also play a critical role in any emergency preparedness and outbreak control initiatives taken by our department. Their skills and job duties parallel those that would be needed to respond quickly and efficiently to urgent public health problems, such as bioterrorism or disease outbreak. In order to meet the State mandates for communicable disease follow-up we need to fill this vacancy as soon as possible.

What are examples of public health challenges that would benefit from a Disease Intervention Specialist?

The DIS is a nationally recognized staffing model based on best practices with clearly defined standards and competencies related to disease knowledge, outreach, referral and treatment. Specifically the (DIS) functions as part of a disease investigation and intervention team. The DIS plans and participates in programs related to the control of various communicable diseases, specifically sexually transmitted infections. Duties include: locating disease sources, carriers and at-risk groups to prevent, treat and thereby reduce the incidence and risk to citizens; providing counseling to patients diagnosed positive for a communicable disease, and to provide information on disease etiology and the prevention of communicable diseases.

How has this function been fulfilled during the vacancy?

The STI/HIV team has been drawing on the capacity of other PHNs, clinic aides and staff to manage the client demand in clinical testing, follow-up and treatment services. The impact has put a strain on other programs and their teams to effectively manage their respective workloads. We have also reinstated a former Nurse Practitioner, on a limited short term basis, to perform client testing and follow-up to cover these mandated services.

What will the impact be on the department's function and mission if the position remains vacant?

In Madison and Dane County we have high rates of STIs requiring a significant amount of staff time to follow up on each case. For example, in 2015, 2000 cases of Chlamydia and Gonorrhea requiring follow up were reported to us. Due to a current staffing shortage we have been unable to keep up with the required follow up in a timely manner, which can lead to a delay in notification and treatment of sexual partners exposed to STIs, thereby potentially exposing more people in our community to STIs.

Thank you for your help in filling this important position in the Community Health Division of PHMDC. Please let me know if you need any additional information.