

COUNTY PERSONNEL COMMITTEE MEETING
DECEMBER 10, 1997, 2:00 PM

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: Tom Bacote, Commissioner
Johnnie Evans, Commissioner
H. Mac Tyson II, Commissioner

OTHERS: John Beasley, Regional State Personnel Office

STAFF: Cliff Strassenburg, County Manager
James Martin, Deputy County Manager
Juanita Pilgrim, Assistant County Manager
Pat Jones, Personnel Director
Dr. Jesse Williams, Health Department Director
Neil Yarborough, County Attorney
Rhonda Davis, Deputy Clerk

AGENDA ITEMS

1. **Consideration of a Request for Salary Adjustments for Selected Health Department Positions (Referred by Board of Commissioners on November 17, 1997).**

James Martin introduced Mr. John Beasley of the Regional State Personnel Office to the Committee. He advised Mr. Beasley was invited because any salary adjustments made to Health Department positions may have an impact on Social Services or Mental Health positions.

Dr. Williams referred to the information attached to his memorandum of December 9th and addressed to the Personnel Committee members and County Manager. He noted he has provided what he feels are concerns and arguments for upgrades of Physicians, P.A.'s Nurse Practitioners, Nurses, Soil Scientists, the Accountant position, Local Public Health Administrator and/or the Management Support Supervisor. Most of the information provided is on the physician and accountant positions. He noted the information outlines the job responsibilities of these positions. The responsibilities have increased and they have tried for some time to get the positions upgraded. He noted the number of budgets the Accountant is responsible for. He is not trying to de-emphasize what someone else is doing, but he wants to emphasize the importance of the Health Department position. He further reviewed the information in the handout.

Mr. Martin asked a question concerning #5 on Attachment B regarding starting base salary for Physician at various local employers. He asked if those positions are in private or public health.

Dr. Williams noted the last two are in private practice. Dr. Williams then asked to go through the history of trying to fill physician vacancies. They currently have five positions vacant. Only one loss has come from death. One physician had to re-locate, but if the pay had been better, he would have stayed. He reviewed the reasons some of the doctors have left the Health Department. He noted that if we continue with the current patient flow, most physicians will earn their keep.

Commissioner Bacote noted Dr. Williams has made the observation that the workload will increase at the Health Department.

Dr. Williams stated he did not see the workload decreasing.

Commissioner Bacote stated he realizes there is a real need for competent physicians.

Dr. Williams reviewed the other attachments in the handout. They have asked for adjustments for the last three years for physicians and nurse practitioners. These adjustments have not been made. He reviewed the specific recommendations as outlined in Attachment G. They recently had to offer a new physician \$7,000 more than the physicians currently on staff. That is not fair to employees who have already on staff. He reviewed the proposal for upgrading the positions and the costs estimates. The cost estimates do not include benefits. He also reviewed the recommendations to upgrade the Accountant position. He noted the Health Department budget is \$12.5 million. They need to keep a good person on staff to do the accounting work. He noted the Public Health Administrator Position was downgraded by DMG. It was appealed, but the salary was not changed.

Mr. Martin advised during the DMG study, they asked that the state and county positions be in the same pay plan. In doing that, basically DMG brought in all state related departments including Health, Mental Health and Social Services at the state salary grade. The difficulty in changing these positions is because of problems created if you chose to move above the specified salary grade. DMG did not specifically study Mental Health, Health or Social Services positions. Mr. Martin asked about item 6 on the recommendations (Management Support Supervisor). He asked if the position had been classified with the State.

Dr. Williams noted the Management Support Supervisor had been classified as an Administrative Assistant position. If they can get Board support, they can argue with the State people and implement it at a higher level. The Management Support Supervisor manages a complex group of people.

Chairman Evans asked if DMG has re-evaluated these positions since Dr. Williams has voiced his concerns.

Mr. Strassenburg noted DMG could not classify the competitive service positions. That is done by the Office of State Personnel.

Mr. Beasley noted he was asked to come to this meeting to clarify things and answer questions. He is not here to make a recommendation. Based on the information furnished to them on the Local Public Health Administrator, the County sets their own pay scale or salary schedule. All classifications are in different groups. If you change one grade in a group, each must be changed in that group. He then reviewed the December 5th handout showing impact of salary adjustments for specific Health Department employees/positions. If the Public Health Administrator position is moved, that would mean you would need to move up the others in the Department of Social Services and Mental Health. He noted no soil scientists are in Mental Health or the Department of Social Services. If the physician positions are changed, they would have to do the same thing at the other departments. They would have to change each position in the class that is changed. There are similar positions in the two other programs. He suggested that Mr. Swift, the local Administrator should meet with the Mental

Health, Health and Social Services Directors and deal with the impact of changing these positions.

Pat Jones advised they are trying to give a spread sheet with the numbers and specific positions that would be affected by these changes.

Mr. Beasley referred to the Administrative Assistant II position. If all the positions had to be increased that would affect the implementation.

Dr. Williams asked if getting the Health Department positions raised would affect Mental Health, why did the changes in Mental Health positions not affect the Health Department?

Mr. Beasley noted that if you are dealing with a salary range that has a high, medium and low point and you are hiring in that range, it will not affect anything.

Chairman Evans asked where physicians are in the range now as far as their salaries go and why can't Mr. Strassenburg handle the situation of moving them above the minimum level.

Mr. Strassenburg noted he only has the authority to hire above the minimum level. So he can only affect new people coming on board. He advised the only solution is to change the pay grade.

Chairman Evans noted we need to address this situation in a different way.

Neil Yarborough noted there may be an easier solution to the problem. The board could allow the County Manager, with approval or justification, to hire anybody at any range and to provide raises or promotions to any existing employee for equity situations.

Mr. Strassenburg noted there would have to be some very close parameters set to do this. He feels the most critical recruitment is the physicians, physician extenders and nurse practitioners. He hasn't seen difficulty in hiring for the other positions.

Chairman Evans noted he had some concerns with the account position.

Mr. Strassenburg stated he would have to look at the complexity of the position, the decision making skills needed and the responsibility.

Ms. Jones noted that since there is one pay plan now, we are dealing with other accountants that are not with the state plan that would also need to be considered.

It was the consensus of the Committee to direct staff to draw up guidelines that would allow the County Manager with the Department Head to make equity adjustments for certain positions.

Commissioner Tyson asked if this recommendation would come back before the Personnel Committee before going to the full Board of Commissioners for approval.

Chairman Evans stated the recommendations would come back to the Committee for review and approval before going to the full Board of Commissioners.

Mr. Strassenburg stated Dr. Williams had some more items on his list of recommendations to review with the Committee.

Commissioner Tyson asked to be excused from the meeting to handle court matters. He also asked that the minutes reflect the Committee's thanks to their Clerk for her excellent work.

Commissioner Tyson left the meeting.

Mr. Strassenburg noted item #7 on "Attachment G" will be taken care of with the Committee's recommendation. Item #8 is a proposal to establish an incentive package. This will require legal review. Item #9 will be addressed by the Committee's recommendation. Item #10 regarding a special benefits package will also require legal review. The vesting cannot be changed because of the state retirement system. He noted management will look at these recommendations and have a response for the Committee at the next meeting. To create special sets of benefits for just a few highly paid employees may get into legal federal requirements and become a problem.

Dr. Williams noted physicians are the key to providing excellent service to the citizens and they must have qualified professionals. He suggested structuring an innovative plan for physicians.

Mr. Yarborough stated there are mechanisms that would need to be in place. There may be some practice mechanisms they could do.

Mr. Strassenburg noted that if this plan is done for physicians, then the County will have to do it for psychiatrists at Mental Health and it will continue to go from there.

Chairman Evans stated most people who have gone to school to become a doctor are willing to work more than 40 hours per week to make the money they want.

Dr. Williams stated it is unfair to feel they can hold this system together without good qualified physicians.

Chairman Evans stated this will be addressed and they understand the situation. He feels the big issue at hand is the physicians.

Dr. Williams thanked Cape Fear Valley Hospital System for working with them in providing names and lists of doctors. He does not feel the Health Department will get local people to fill these positions. They will have to get them from out-of-town.

Dr. Williams then asked about the Medical Laboratory Technicians I & II. They are classified in the DMG study along with the Medical Laboratory Technologist. He feels there was some confusion about these positions with DMG and asked Ms. Jones to check into it.

2. Other Committee Concerns.

No other committee concerns were raised.

Meeting adjourned at 3:08 PM.