

SEARCH Meeting Minutes
December 5, 2017
First Baptist Church, Burnsville

Karin Rolett welcomed a group of 35-40 people and thanked Rev. Tommy James for the use of the church facilities and also thanked all who brought “brain” food.

She framed the evening as a celebration of what SEARCH has accomplished in the past six months and as a bridge between 2017 and 2018. She recognized those who had distributed information regarding ACA sign-up and also asked that people call Senators Burr and Tillis and Rep. Mark Meadows regarding the Individual Mandate. Noting that SEARCH was not intended to be a political action group, she asked if the group feels we should post “calls to action” on the website. By show of hands a majority said they did approve of having such information on the website.

Becky Carter, CNO of BRRH, shared breaking news about Mission. She said that they had reached an agreement with BC/BS and that as of 12/15 Mission Health would be in network.

Susan Larson covered recent SEARCH activities. She reported that the Task Force Chairs met recently and revised the goals, putting on the back burner the original goal of saving labor and delivery, and adding a new 3rd:

1. To preserve, strengthen, and expand access of essential medical services in our area.
 2. To empower greater involvement in decisions affecting the healthcare of our residents.
 3. To monitor the effects of changes in local healthcare services and engage with providers, Mission, and the community if problems arise.
- Feedback: Lee Rule asked if we had defined “essential medical services.” Jon Ward suggested we start with the definition in the ACA. Becky Carter predicted that on December 12 a new executive action would suspend the current definition of essential services.
 - Task Force chairs also recommended several amendments to the structure of the task forces to reflect the way we are currently doing business. The revised list is appended at the end of the minutes.
 - Soon after the November meeting SEARCH received the responses to the 14 questions asked of Dr. Paulus and those responses were summarized by Victoria Hicks and submitted to the local newspapers. Copies of the complete responses were also made available to those present at the December meeting to read and return.
 - In a meeting with Becky Carter and Cara Truitt SEARCH learned about an upcoming change in the hospitalist system. From 11 p.m. to 7 a.m. there won't be a physician on the floor; questions requiring a response from a physician will be handled through Eagle Telemedicine. There will continue to be a physician in the Emergency Department.
 - The situation in surgery is that two surgeons must cover both McDowell and Blue Ridge Regional Hospitals; the 3rd surgeon will not be returning nor will the locum tenens. In response to questions asking what Mission Health is doing to rectify this situation, Becky Carter said that

Mission is actively recruiting surgeons and that there are changes in the works that could increase surgical access at BRRH.

- Risa Larsen reported on a meeting in Marion “Increasing Health Coverage in Rural North Carolina” sponsored by the Rural Center, Care for Carolina and NC Child. She will work with Connie Sales to put details on the website. Of particular interest was the presence at that meeting of Josh Dobson who explained House Bill 662 which has the potential to significantly decrease the number of uninsured in North Carolina. HB 662 has not yet passed.
- SEARCH gave Becky Carter the names of seven people who have agreed to serve on the Blue Ridge Regional Hospital Board and the board and BC are interviewing the candidates.
- The SEARCH website is being updated and will include PDFs of letters to the editor and articles which have appeared in the local papers.
- Television coverage related to the closing of Labor and Delivery has continued.
- The idea of having a roundtable with elected officials on the topic of rural healthcare is being considered, possibly with the help of the Rural Center.

The second half of the meeting was led by Juanita Brown and Karin Rolett. They asked everyone to write the greatest challenges (41 identified) and opportunities (36) facing healthcare locally. These will be summarized and used to shape a plan for SEARCH going forward.

SEARCH Task Forces and Descriptions

1	Communication w/ BRRH Board, BRRH Foundation Board, and Mission Health Board: Establish channels of regular communication with these boards
2	Media Relations: Create a continual presence in local media and on social media, and an occasional presence outside of the region.
3	Government Relations: Maintain contact with elected officials, encourage their participation and monitor their actions on healthcare.
4	Monitor Outcomes: Monitor the effects of hospital policies and practices on the well-being of our citizens.
5	SEARCH Infrastructure: Organize meetings, set the agenda, and communicate with interested people and parties. Perform research on health care issues in the community as a basis for formulating our position and action plan.
6	Plan B: Explore ways of sustaining and expanding essential healthcare services in our local area.
7	Community Outreach: Learn about the needs and desires for healthcare in our local community as well as the barriers to fulfilling them. Construct models to meet those needs.

JANUARY MEETING: Tuesday, January 9. Trinity Episcopal Church, Spruce Pine. 7:00 p.m.