

Boston University Medical Campus

Community Liaison Committee (CLC)

National Emerging Infectious Diseases Laboratories (NEIDL)

MEETING NOTES

February 11, 2025

6:00 pm. *Zoom

Attendees:

Dr. Jean Lee, CLC; J. Kevin Fisher, CLC; Robert Timmerman, CLC; Norm Stembridge, CLC; Jim Keeney, CLC; Joe Lillis, CLC; Olawumi Akinwumi, CLC; Nefertiti Lawrence, CLC; Dr. Nancy Sullivan, Director. NEIDL, Edward Avedisian Professor and Professor of Virology. Immunology & Microbiology; Professor of Biology; Dr. John Connor, NEIDL, Professor, Virology, Immunology & Microbiology; Adam Carter, Executive Director NEIDL; Scott Rush, NEIDL; Louis Amadio, NEIDL; Meridith St Jean NEIDL; Joe Maldonis NEIDL, Sierra Downs, NEIDL; Jose Soliz, Community Member; Valeda Britton, Executive Director Community Affairs; Kenneth Ryan, Interim Vice President, Government & Community Affairs, Elizabeth Leary, Executive Director, Government & Community Affairs/Relations Med Campus, BU; Fernando Fortin, Director, Community Outreach, BU

NEIDL Director Update:

Dr Sullivan started the meeting by welcoming all attendees. She said that the NEIDL is assessing how the new administration's priorities will affect the NEIDL and assumes that final directives from the Executive Branch will ultimately incorporate opinions from Congress and the Judiciary. Either way, the NEIDL remains steadfast in its commitment to excellence in safety, ensuring the highest standards of biosafety and security in all its operations.

She noted the new administration has tapped Dr. Gerald Parker, the former leader of the National Sciences Advisory Board for Biosecurity under the Biden administration, as the head of the White House Office of Pandemic Preparedness. Dr. Parker is knowledgeable. He understands the value of bio-preparedness and the important role that labs like the NEIDL play.

Adam Carter, Executive Director NEIDL, then mentioned that the annual BSL-3 and BSL-4 permit has been submitted to the Boston Public Health Commission. The NEIDL is moving ahead with recruiting faculty.

Scott Rusk, NEIDL Director of Operations, gave an update on the new research facilities construction grant or CO6 grant awarded by the National Institutes of Health. This construction grant is in the early design phase. He reiterated that it would enable BU to make important upgrades to the building and enhance its safety equipment. This grant would allow the modernization of decontamination, isolation, pressure controls systems and permit new air locks as well as retrofit the insectary containment space.

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Dr John Connor- Sequencing Viral Genomes in Boston

Dr. Connor started his presentation by reminding the CLC members that he has been a frequent presenter to the CLC and has enjoyed talking to this group. In 2014, he gave a presentation on his work with viruses and how bodies react to the invasions of these viruses. His team was involved in researching vaccines to protect people from Ebola, Lassa Fever and Marburg. The FDA approved one Ebola virus vaccine in 2019. In 2016, he told us about his research involving Zika and its impact on brain and cognitive capabilities. In 2017, he informed us about his collaboration on a diagnostic device that provided an accurate, rapid and affordable method to detect virus particulates. This device was to be used in Africa and other limited resource countries. We heard that the instrument that does the virus imaging is now being commercially sold and is now used to speed the development of gene therapies and vaccines. In 2018, Dr. Connor discussed his lab's research in tracking covid-19 variants of concern. By breaking apart samples supplied by BU, BMC and Tufts and reading the genomes, the City of Boston as well as the Commonwealth were able to map the spread of these viruses and determine which variants were increasing or decreasing in specific areas and populations.

Today, Dr Connor told us about his ongoing research project. He is still using viral genome sequencing to track respiratory diseases caused by viruses. This research is an outgrowth of the Covid-19 work started in 2020. The aim with colleagues from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and around New England, is to build an understanding of the genetic identity of different types of respiratory viruses including influenza, RSV and Covid. By comparing viruses locally, nationally and globally, they will be able to respond faster and more efficiently to the next pandemic.

Sierra Downs-Emergency Planning at the NEIDL

Sierra Downs holds the position of Training Assistant Director at the NEIDL. In that capacity, she is responsible for overseeing and spearheading local and federally regulated exercises and drills. Each January, people from NEIDL Environmental Health, Leadership, IT, Facilities, and Public Safety meet to conduct a Hazard Vulnerability and Risk Assessment (HVRA). They evaluate an extensive list of potential hazards such as technological, human caused and naturally occurring.

From this list, they plan three NEIDL drills and exercises which incorporate Federal and City requirements for the NEIDL. This drill/ exercise team of experts devises one drill testing security. Another drill tests the facility/building infrastructure, while the third drill involves a joint response to a research incident with Boston Medical Center. All three drills have the capacity to involve internal and external first responders. The NEIDL CLC is invited as observers. Ms. Downs reminded CLC members that they are encouraged to participate and play a valuable role giving community feedback.

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Government& Community Affairs- Update

Ms. Britton suggested that for accuracy and efficiency purposes, all CLC meetings be recorded. She emphasized that after meeting notes were posted on the website, those recordings would be deleted. Hearing no objections, Government & Community Affairs started their update. Since our last meeting in November, Boston University has continued its strong community engagement efforts. Through the Holiday Reading Program, in partnership with BU Athletics, student-athletes visited over 30 classrooms across seven Boston Public Schools, distributing books to students—including bilingual books for English and Spanish speakers for the first time.

Our Speaker Series also expanded at the O'Bryant School of Math & Science and MATCH Charter High School, where we introduced the new "My Journey to..." series.

In January, our NEIDL Pathologist, Dr. Crossland, stopped by the Dearborn STEM Academy to share his expertise and lead an exciting microscope training session for middle school science teachers.

In January, we also welcomed O'Bryant students to our medical campus for lab tours. As part of this initiative, we hosted a Biomedicine Mentoring Hour for students in the Biomedicine Innovation Pathway Class, connecting them with seven BU School of Public Health faculty members for personalized advice and mentorship. All events were met with enthusiastic feedback from both students and volunteers. Thus, reinforcing the importance of collaboration and guidance in fostering student growth and career exploration.

A special thank you to all BU staff, faculty, and partners who contributed to this impactful experience.

Next meeting-April 8, 2025