

Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee (MMMRC)
FINAL DRAFT: Meeting Minutes
Thursday, September 7, 2023
9:00 a.m.

Virtual: Teams Meeting Platform
Location: Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS)
Robert Bernstein Building
Room K-100, First Floor
1100 West 49th Street
Austin, Texas 78756

Agenda Item 1: Call to order, welcome, roll call, and introductions

Dr. Carla Ortique, Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Dr. Ortique announced this was the Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee (MMMRC) meeting.

Dr. Ortique, Chair, welcomed all committee members, staff, and team members attending. She acknowledged the work done by the committee is a critical part in the effort to address maternal deaths and disparities. Dr. Ortique stressed the works honor the lives that have been lost of Texas women during pregnancy, childbirth, and the year after and requested a moment of silence in honor of the women as well as their families and communities that have been touched by the loss of a mother.

Dr. Ortique introduced Ms. Tessa Buck-Ragland, HHSC, Advisory Committee Coordination Office (ACCO), to read logistical announcements and call roll and determined if a quorum was reached.

Ms. Buck-Ragland began by announcing and introducing Ms. Jessica Arevalo as the new ACCO facilitator for the Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee (MMMRC), then proceeded with the meeting logistics and roll call. Ms. Buck-Ragland announced that with thirteen (13) members present, quorum was met.

Table 1: Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee attendance Thursday, September 7, 2023, meeting.

MEMBER NAME	IN ATTENDANCE
Dr. Eumenia Castro	No
Dr. Meitra Doty	Yes
Dr. Catherine Eppes	Yes
Dr. Kelly Fegan-Bohm	Yes
Dr. Manda Hall	Yes
Dr. James Hill	Yes
Dr. Sherri Onyiego	Yes
Dr. Carla Ortique, Chair	Yes
Dr. Lavannya Pandit	Yes
Ms. Nancy Puig	No
Dr. Amy Raines-Milenkov	Yes
Dr. Christina Murphey	Yes
Dr. Patrick Ramsey, Vice Chair	Yes
Dr. Robin Page	Yes
Ms. Nakeenya Wilson	Yes
VACANT	-
VACANT	-

Yes: Indicates attended the meeting

No: Indicates did not attend the meeting

Dr. Ortique announced that the posted agenda item number 7 would be next to accommodate the schedule of the presenter and proceeded to agenda item #7.

Agenda Item 7: Impact of COVID-19 on the State of Texas

Dr. Ortique introduced Dr. Jennifer Shuford, Commissioner of the Texas Department of State Health Services, to update members and the public on the impact of COVID-19 in Texas.

Dr. Jennifer Shuford presented a PowerPoint Presentation, "The Impact of COVID-19 in the State of Texas between March 2020 and July 2023". She discussed the following during her presentation:

- Trends related to case count, hospitalization, and fatality;
- Leading causes of death pre-pandemic and during the pandemic years;
- Excessive death from COVID-19 was higher than expected in 2020, during which Hispanics were observed to have a higher percentage rate of death;
- Sub-population trends from March 2020 to March 2021
 - The number of hospitalizations was higher for non-Hispanic Blacks in quarter one than for other race/ethnic groups.
 - The number of hospitalizations was higher for Hispanics and non-Hispanic Blacks in quarter two than for other race/ethnic groups.
 - The number of hospitalizations equalized among racial/ethnic groups during quarters three and four.
 - This trend was also seen with regard to case counts and fatalities and a similar profile was seen nationally.
 - Most fatalities were seen in the sixty-five and over age group.
 - Geographically, there were fewer than expected fatalities along the I-35 corridor and higher than expected in Harris County, along the border, and in the panhandle.
 - During the immediate post-partum period, pregnant women with COVID-19 were observed to have greater all-cause mortality than non-pregnant women and pregnant women without COVID-19.

Questions?

Pandit

Q1. Was vaccine availability a confounding variable in your analysis of 2020-2021 data?

Q2. Do we have vaccination rates for pregnant women? Are those rates a confounding variable in your analysis of total rates?

Shuford – Vaccine administration played a greater role earlier in the pandemic when it was being rationed. By March 2021, the COVID-19 vaccine was more widely available. The allocation of the vaccine was a confounding variable in the analysis of transmission rates.

Q. What recommendations might the committee make, given this information?

Shuford

Educate the community on the safety of vaccines and research trials. Include pregnant women in those trials. Do not exclude individuals for respiratory illnesses.

Wilson

Q. What were the drivers behind the increased transmission, hospitalization, and deaths for Hispanic, rural, and non-Hispanic Black populations?

Shuford

These specific disparities were seen across the country.

The available data does not give any insight as to any specific factor(s) that came into play.

It was noted that many people in lower socio-economic groups live in multi-generational housing and that individuals in lower socio-economic groups did not get equal opportunities to work remotely. Both factors played a role in the dynamics of COVID-19 transmission.

It was also noted that patients with more chronic diseases experienced more severe illness.

Ramsey

Would like to see cases, hospitalizations, and fatalities specifically for pregnant women and suggested a look at the available mortality and morbidity data.

Shuford

Will be happy to help with Epidemiologic data if we need to combine data sets.

Dr. Hill

Q1. Does the state collect vaccination data by race/ethnicity?

Q2a. Wants to see data sorted by the disease severity, with sub-sorting by race/ethnicity.

Q2.b. What factor(s) is used to determine the severity of the disease?

Q3. What more can you tell us regarding the higher levels of hospitalizations and deaths in Hispanic and non-Hispanic white populations?

Q4. According to the CDC, why are we seeing disparities?

Shuford

When vaccine administration began, the State was not keeping track of the race/ethnicity of vaccine recipients, as vaccine recipients were not required to identify their race/ethnicity. This tracking began later.

Hospitalizations are used as the proxy in determining disease severity.

Agenda Item 2: Consideration of March 3, 2023, and June 2, 2023, draft meeting minutes

Dr. Ortique turned the floor over to Ms. Buck-Ragland to proceed with the consideration of the March 3, and June 2, 2023, draft minutes. Ms. Buck-Ragland asked members if there were any edits or changes needed in either draft; hearing none, she requested a motion to approve both March 3 and June 2, 2023, minutes as presented.

MOTION:

Dr. James Hill motioned to approve both sets of minutes as presented, and Dr. Patrick Ramsey seconded. Ms. Buck-Ragland conducted a roll call vote, and the motion passed with thirteen (13) approve (Doty, Eppes, Fegan-Bohm, Hall, Hill, Murphey, Onyiego, Ortique, Page, Pandit, Raines-Milenkov, Ramsey, Wilson), no disapprove, no abstain. Ms. Buck-Ragland turned the floor back to Dr. Ortique to move to agenda item number three.

Agenda Item 3: Review and consideration of the Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Committee Bylaws

Dr. Carla Ortique introduced Ida Murguia, HHSC Legal, to review and answer members' questions regarding the Committee Bylaws.

Ms. Murguia reviewed the proposed changes to the MMMRC Bylaws for the MMMRC members.

Ms. Murguia yielded the floor to Dr. Ortique to entertain questions and/or comments.

Wilson

There has been a change regarding the specific qualifications required for one to serve in a Community Advocate role on the committee. There will now be two community advocates, both possessing relevant healthcare experience. One will represent rural Texas, and the other will represent urban Texas.

Q1. – Define “relevant healthcare experience.”

Q2. Define “rural” and “urban.”

A. Murguia – unable to answer those questions as they require legal interpretation. Today, the vote will be to adopt or not adopt the legislature’s language.

Wilson –

Q3. Will both community advocates be required to possess relevant health care experience?

Q4. Does “metropolitan” equate with “urban”?

A. Again, unable to answer the first question as it requires legal interpretation. “Metropolitan” would certainly be considered a portion of an “Urban” area.

MOTION:

Dr. Ortique requested a motion to adopt the MMMRC bylaws with proposed edits. Dr. Onyiego motioned to accept the bylaws with edits, and Dr. Fegan-Bohm seconded. Ms. Buck-Ragland conducted a roll call vote, and the motion passed with twelve (12) votes to approve (Doty, Eppes, Fegan-Bohm, Hall, Hill, Murphey, Onyiego, Ortique, Page, Pandit, Raines-Milenkov, Ramsey), no disapprove, one (1) abstain (Wilson). Ms. Buck-Ragland turned the floor back to Dr. Ortique to move to agenda item number four.

Agenda Item 4: Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee Subcommittees updates

Dr. Carla Ortique provided Chair updates and an overview of brief reports she would like to receive for the upcoming meetings.

A. Chair Update as listed in the posted agenda

Dr. Carla Ortique provided the update

Dr. Ortique presented ideas that she feels will re-invigorate committee members and make the committee meetings events that the members will want to attend, including:

- Inviting speakers, such as Dr. Shuford today, to present on topics that will be included in the next MMMRC-DSHS Biennial Report;

- Including educational presentations on relevant issues in all future meetings that are 30 to 45 minutes in length and approved for CME activity;
- Having the four MMMRC Review Teams provide updates during the quarterly meeting and
- Receiving annual updates from the Perinatal Advisory Committee and the Texas Collaborative for Healthy Mothers and Babies.

Dr. Ortique also:

- Acknowledged the MMMRC's need to increase their capacity to review cases. One thought is to review a representative sample of the total number of certain case types, which would reduce the number of cases reviewed by the MMMRC by 15% to 20% while still meeting the requirements of the committee's statute.
 - Suicide and overdose cases during pregnancy and up to 180 days post-partum;
 - Homicide cases that occur during pregnancy and up to 90 days post-partum;
 - Any death in which cancer was diagnosed during pregnancy and
 - Any death due to infectious disease, particularly respiratory in nature, which occurred during pregnancy and up to 12 weeks post-partum (although all 2020 COVID-19-related cases will be reviewed).
- Reviewed highlights of the selection process for new committee members.
- Provided an update on a new initiative created by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). On September 20, the CDC will host a kickoff event for their Community Practice Forum for Morbidity and Mortality Review Committee members and facilitators. The forum is based on Texas M3RC's participation in MMRIA.
- Announced: Dr. Ramsey, Lori Gabbert-Charney, and Dr. Ortique have been invited to represent Texas at the learning collaborative. They will have the opportunity to meet with Maternal Mortality and Morbidity review committees from all 50 states, not just during this event but regularly to benchmark, share knowledge, and learn from other states' successes and challenges.
- Reminded members that it was time to start thinking about the themes and format for the Biennial Report, the final draft of which must be completed by the end of June 2024 to meet the deadline for the agency review process that will allow the report to be released in September 2024. Committee members should anticipate receiving the timeline at the December meeting.

Dr. Carla Ortique introduced Dr. Catherine Eppes, MD, Member of the COVID-19 Subcommittee Chair, to provide members with an update.

B. Subcommittee on COVID-19 Update as listed in the posted agenda.

Dr. Catherine Eppes provided the update.

Dr. Eppes discussed the recent work of the COVID-19 subcommittee. The committee's anticipated strategy for determining COVID-19's impact on maternal mortality and morbidity was announced and documented at the June committee meeting.

The committee has since met to discuss the abstraction process, as additional data pieces need to be identified and captured to determine COVID-19's impact during pregnancy and the post-partum period:

- COVID-19 vaccination;
- COVID-19 medication and other therapeutic modalities, and
- Staffing shortages.
 - When did shortages influence a pregnant and/or post-partum woman's access to care?

The University of North Texas Health Science Center (UNTHSC) abstractors have since revised their process, and the subcommittee is starting to see the results in the newest cases they are receiving. Post-review of the 2020 cohort, the subcommittee intends to reevaluate the process to ensure that the necessary data is being collected to support the intended analysis and to modify the process if necessary.

Dr. Carla Ortique turned the floor over to Dr. Sherri Onyiego, Maternal Health Disparities Chair, MD, Member.

- C. Subcommittee on Maternal Health Disparities** as listed in the posted agenda. Dr. Sherri Onyiego provided the update.

At the Subcommittee meeting held on August 4, 2023:

- The Discrimination Assessment and Social Determinants of Health (DASH) Facilitated Discussion Tool (DASH Tool) pilot study was shared with other jurisdictions.
- Internal review revisions of the DASH Tool are in progress.
- Dr. Kelly Fegan-Bohm is assisting the Subcommittee in exploring a tool to review homicide cases.

Dr. Ortique opened the floor to Q&A.

Seeing no questions – Dr. Ortique proceeded to Agenda Item 5.

Agenda Item 5: Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee Team updates

Dr. Carla Ortique explained to members that she briefly spoke about the Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee Teams in her Chair update in agenda item #4 and gave the opportunity to any of the team members to report to the members on information they might want to present.

Ms. Nakeenya Wilson provided an update on behalf of Team 2.

- Team 2 completed 50% of their reviews within days of this open meeting.
- Redaction/abstraction burden is the most limiting step in the review process.
- Receipt of incomplete files and interviews makes it difficult for the team to do due diligence in reviewing cases. They stated that the team's findings and recommendations would be more accurate if they received complete files and interviews.
- Dr. Ortique provided feedback regarding the 2025 legislative session and that DSHS and HHSC can continue to look at the redaction/abstraction issue.

Dr. Ortique opened the floor for further discussion/input/questions.

Seeing none, she proceeded to agenda item 6.

Agenda Item 6: Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee Operational and Maternal Health and Safety Initiative Updates

Dr. Carla Ortique introduces Ms. Lori Gabbert Charney, MPAff, PMP, CTCM, DSHS, Maternal, and Child Health Section Director, to provide members an update on:

Ms. Lori Gabbert Charney:

- Provided an update on recent staffing developments:
 - Departure of former Maternal and Child Health Director Audrey Young and subsequent hire of Dr. Shruthi Arismendez as the new MCHU Director. Dr. Arismendez was present at the meeting and was acknowledged.
 - Posting for a Manager for the Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Operations Branch closed on Monday and hopes that a new manager will be hired by October.
 - The Maternal and Child Health Section successfully audited another position within the Branch to a Program Specialist III.
 - The Program Specialist III position also closed on Monday.
- Acknowledged the participation of several review committee members at the August TexasAIM Opioid Summit and spotlighted presentations by Dr. Ortique and Dr. Doty.
- Provided an update was provided regarding the filling of vacated, expired, and new committee member positions.
 - Six positions, including expired and vacant positions, were posted on June 5, 2023, and four of which closed in July. These include positions for social workers and medical doctors (MDs) specializing in obstetrics, maternal-fetal medicine, and psychiatry.
 - The other two committee positions, a medical examiner and an MD specializing in pathology closed in August 2023.
 - Seven new members are to be added to the MMMRC. Applications for those member positions will open in mid-September and include: Two community advocates, a managed care organization representative, and MDs specializing in emergency medicine, cardiology, anesthesiology, and oncology.

Agenda Item 8: Future Agenda Items

Dr. Ortique opened discussion for new business and potential agenda items for the next meeting scheduled for Friday, December 8, 2023.

The next meeting of the Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee will be on December 7 and 8, 2023.

The next open meeting of the Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee will be on December 8, 2023.

Dr. Ortique reminded members that she anticipates HHSC will present on trauma, informed care, and other items at the next open meeting.

Dr. Hall suggested that the committee receive regular updates from the Community Practice Forum at future open meetings.

Agenda Item 9: Public Comment

One (1) written public comment was received, and that letter was shared with members prior to the meeting. Two individuals pre-registered to provide oral comments, one virtually, Ms. Erin Boldt, RN. Ms. Boldt was unable to join the meeting at the time of the Agenda Item. The Program area will reach out to Ms. Boldt to offer the opportunity to send a written comment to the members. One individual appeared in person to give an oral comment. Oral comments were received from Dinah Waranch, Certified Nurse Midwife.

Agenda Item 10: Executive Session: to review cases under the Texas Health and Safety Code, Chapter 34. Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee, Section 34.007. Selection and Review of Cases as authorized by Section 34.004.

Dr. Ortique read the legislation allowing the Review Committee to move into a closed executive session.

She announced that it was 11:08 a.m., and the committee was now going into a closed session.

The committee will return later in the afternoon to reopen the meeting from closed to open session before adjourning for the day, as statutorily required. There will be a break to allow room turnover, and the committee will resume their meeting in closed session.

Ms. Buck-Ragland announced to members of the public that this concluded the open meeting for the morning, and the public was informed that the review committee would return later in the afternoon to open the closed session and then adjourn.

Agenda Item 11: Adjournment

Dr. Ortique reopened the meeting at 4:52 p.m. and stated with no further business or discussion, she would adjourn the meeting at 4:52 p.m.

Below is the link to the archived video of the September 7, 2023, Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee (MMMRC) meeting that will be available for viewing approximately two years from the date the meeting was posted on the website and based on the DSHS records retention schedule.

[Texas Maternal Mortality and Morbidity Review Committee \(MMMRC\) September 7, 2023](#)