

3-30-16 County Judge's Article

COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT CHANGES

In another move to reduce costs, at Monday's regular meeting of Commissioner's Court we voted to have Region 7 of the Texas Department of State Health Services take over the operation of the Milam County Health Department. They will assume responsibility for providing the clinical services for TB, immunizations, sexually transmitted diseases (STD), and HIV plus the Public Health Preparedness program. The county will provide office and clinic space in the same locations in Cameron and Rockdale but schedules will be reduced to one or two days per week.

Some services that were reporting to the County Health Department director will be kept in the county and will report to the Commissioner's Court through the County Judge. These include the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, Milam County Indigent Health Care, and the Septic Inspection/Permitting programs. The region does not handle these services.

These changes will result in a reduction in the Health Department budget for 2017 to approximately \$100,000 with some \$30,000 of that being recouped through septic permitting fees and \$15,000 through other fees that will be continued through local immunization programs which we are planning to continue. This compares to the 2016 budget which was set at \$262,000 and a 2015 actual expenditure of almost \$200,000.

These services that continue to report to the county will be staffed five days per week. The current Milam County Health Department and the Texas Department of Health folks are working hard to have only the name on the door change from "County" to "Regional" Health Department with the goal of keeping all activities and services available to the citizens of Milam County.

Obviously there will be an impact on service, but the attempt will be to minimize the impact. The reality is that due to the continued drop in the county's tax base, we must look for ways to reduce costs. There are only a half dozen counties the size of Milam county or smaller that have their own county health departments, the rest participate in regionally administered programs. Region 7 is made up of some 30 counties, only 5 others have individual county health departments, Bell, Williamson, Travis, McLennan, and Brazos ranging in population from over 200,000 to a million plus. Seven are larger than Milam County but do not have their own health departments.

So it is appropriate for Milam County to join the ranks of all the other counties like us that have their health programs administered on a regional basis rather than trying to pay for it locally.