

Op-Ed: A Little History of Easton



What happened to the PHNA of Easton, aka Public Health Nursing Association of Easton Inc.? I venture to say that many Eastonites have never heard of this volunteer, non-for-profit organization that served our town for about 70 years!

Before we give our final ye or nay to join the Westport/Weston Health District, we need to go down memory lane and see what role the PHNA played in Easton's life. Should it be resurrected or could we build on it as we are wrestling with state mandates and regionalization while trying to keep our independence.

PHNA of Easton Inc. was an accredited, volunteer, not-for-profit agency, founded in 1937. It had a very active six-member board of directors with a four-member staff and was funded through fundraisers and private donations.

The services it provided included:

- - Annual flu clinics
- - Preschool vision tests
- - Blood pressure monitoring
- - Hospital home care
- - Mammography screenings
- - Full time nursing supervision

- - Home visits for skilled nursing care
- - Speech, physical and occupational therapy
- - Loan closet
- - Dental hygiene for the lower schools
- During 1975-76 the board was forced to make some drastic changes in its structure and method of operations. Adding a full time supervisor while it helped to meet accreditation as a Medicare Home Health Agency was not enough to meet several state mandates, like including nursing services in the schools as well as supervision and administration of the agency. The solution was to join the Town of Trumbull's Public Health Association. The contract included a dedicated nurse to Easton supervising and coordinating all services such as physical therapy, home health aides among others. The two nurses on PHNA's staff were transferred to each of the lower schools. The board of directors continued to be responsible for the quality of the nursing and related care of our residents.
- The arrangement with the Town of Trumbull lasted through 1989. In 1990 the services were contracted to United Home Care, followed by United Visiting Nurse Association in 2000 and Health and Respite Connection w/VNA in 2005. In 2008 the organization after careful consideration folded and transferred its assets to the Easton Senior Center. With Medicare and private insurance covering most of the services that the original PHNA and its successors provided to the town, the board had no other choice but discontinue its existence. The health officer, the Senior Center, the municipal agent for the elderly together with the Police Department are covering many of the prior PHNA programs.

It is important to note that PHNA did not work in the vacuum, i.e., it was supported by the director of health and the health officer. Through 1992 the building official and the health officer was one and the same person. As the health officer, he oversaw new septic systems, repairs to existing ones, new wells and inspections of the same. In 1993 the job was split and a part time health officer came on board. It begs the question what happened in 2008 and afterward when the Easton Health and Respite Connection w/VNS

was dissolved. Who was responsible for state mandates? Did it take 12 years to inform the town that we are not in compliance and have no choice but joining the consortium? Also, what are the exact mandates that we need to tend to?

Immunizations and flu shots are covered by our own physicians, the drug stores and the Senior Center. Other low cost services are covered by insurance reimbursements. What is the additional cost to the town to cover the general health industry mandates?

Another part time position? Whether for the schools or for the town in general, is the additional cost worthwhile to give up our independence? This is a huge step for our town so think about this before you cast your vote.