



North Central Health Care
Aquatic Services

**AQUATIC THERAPY SERVICES TASK FORCE
REPORT TO THE
MARATHON COUNTY BOARD**

Thursday, October 10, 2013



Aquatic Therapy Task Force Members

Steve Anderson
Sue Gebhardt
Gary Gisselman
Linda Haney
Dr. Thomas Joseph
Jack Kivi
John Robinson

Support Staff

Brad Beilke
Brenda Budnik
Brenda Glodowski
Terry Kaiser
Toni Simonson



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Aquatic Therapy Services Task Force

Executive Summary

In 1977 North Central Health Care (NCHC) opened its pool to the community, initially serving individuals with developmental disabilities and persistent mental illness who were transferred from state institutions back to the community. In 1998 NCHC began offering aquatic therapy services to address a need in the community. Since it opened, the pool has served the community well but it has outlived its design life and is facing structural, mechanical and operational issues. The pool's equipment is outdated and inefficient to operate.

The services provided through the aquatic therapy program are unique and have a positive impact on the quality of life for the pool users. Services are provided based on a recognized medical need with a required physician referral. The combination of a warm water environment along with a dedicated professional staff has resulted in a quality program serving the needs of the residents of Marathon County. The affiliation with NCHC Psychiatric Hospital allows patients to access insurance coverage and Medicare and Medicaid funding. In the last four years there has been a 119.2% increase in net revenue while expenses have increases 28.3%.

Currently 199 physicians are referring patients to the program for treatment. In 2012 there were over 20,000 visits to the pool. Services ranging from intensive therapy sessions, and related maintenance therapy to water exercise programs allow the users to increase or maintain flexibility and strength. The unique warm water pool allows users to live independently, improve the quality of their lives, and/or return to work.

Over the past several months the Aquatic Therapy Services Task Force has been meeting to review the current and future use of the pool. Members have evaluated the financial information, pool utilization rates and future demographic trends and met with representatives from the physician community. Based on the information collected, the Task Force members believe that there is a demonstrated need for the County to continue to provide aquatic therapy services and that there is the ability for that program to generate significant income. The Task Force's findings are summarized in the attached report.

However in order to complete the evaluation of the future capital needs and prepare a long term financial plan the Task Force recommends that the County engage the services of a professional design team to develop a Preliminary Design, Evaluation and Analysis of Options Report. The report would address issues relating to the appropriate size of the facility, design options and location. It would also evaluate funding sources available to support these services in the future. Once the Report is completed the County will be in a better position to make a decision on moving toward the replacement of the existing pool necessary to support aquatic therapy services.

History of the Pool

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND OF THE NCHC AQUATIC THERAPY POOL

NCHC's therapeutic pool was built in 1977. At that time, over 100 Marathon County residents with developmental disabilities and severe and persistent mental illness, most of whom were transitioned from the state institutions, lived at NCHC. The therapy pool was used by these individuals as part of their rehabilitation program. Over time, many of these individuals were successfully transitioned from NCHC to live in the community. Other populations served at that time included children that participated in the Birth to Three program, inpatient clients from the Psychiatric Hospital and Drug and Alcohol treatment unit, and people from community.

In April, 1998, NCHC began to offer aquatic physical therapy. The program was initially offered two days per week (12-13 hours); growth and expansion continued over the years and currently water therapy is offered 32 hours per week. The therapy pool is available six days per week (57.5 hours total) for physical therapy, "on-your-own" therapy/exercise and structured classes.

In late 2008, with the assistance of a volunteer whose profession was strategic marketing planning and marketing communication, both a strategic marketing plan and marketing communication plan were developed with input from pool staff and approval by NCHC's CEO. In 2008, 225 patients received aquatic physical therapy treatment. During 2012 (four years later), a 104% increase was noted (458 patients).

In 2008, 124 hours of maintenance physical therapy were performed by a pool aid (rather than a physical therapist). A 333% increase was noted in 2012, with 533 hours of maintenance physical therapy provided to patients.

Referring physicians have grown from 156 (in 2008) to 199 in 2012. This represents a 28% increase.

In 2010 there were 622 individuals who used the pool for "on-your-own" therapy/exercise. This increased to 715 in 2012, representing a 15% increase in this two year span. Enrollment in classes remained stable.

In mid-2009, staff was increased to handle the increasing number of patients. As identified in the Strategic Marketing Plan, pricing was not commensurate with other physical therapy services offered in the region, so fee increases have gradually been made. This has helped the therapy pool increase its profitability and get closer to a “break-even” budget. It currently operates without County subsidy.

CREATION OF AQUATIC TASK FORCE

The County Board authorized the creation of an Aquatic Task Force to address the need for the an aquatic therapy pool on a go-forward basis as the pool is starting to experience signs of aging and needs repair/replacement. The first meeting of this committee was held on June 18, 2013. The purpose of this task force is to address aquatic physical therapy needs in the County. Issues to be addressed by the task force include:

- Evaluate the existing facility
- Evaluate aquatic therapy needs in the future
- Identify options to provide aquatic therapy services to the residents of the county
- Identify funding sources

The task force is comprised of seven individuals representing the County Board, physician community, therapy pool patients/users, business community, and the community at large. Four non-voting NCHC employees also serve on the committee.

The task force is charged with making a recommendation to the Health and Human Services Committee of the Marathon County Board by November 1, 2013.

Defining the Service Needs

WHAT MAKES AQUATIC PHYSICAL THERAPY UNIQUE AND DISTINGUISHES IT FROM LAND-BASED THERAPY?

Aquatic Services provides a warm-water environment with handicapped-accessible locker rooms, pool design, and ramps into the water for those who are in wheelchairs or cannot do stairs. The unique 90-degree water temperature facilitates muscle relaxation and increases peripheral circulation. Natural buoyancy of the water reduces the force of gravity and can help increase range of motion, balance, strength, coordination, and overall health without the risk of falling. Due to the offloading of a patient's weight, therapists can be more aggressive with treatment in the water than on land, and aquatic therapy is generally more tolerable for the patient.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE THESE SERVICES AVAILABLE?

User Perspective

Individuals of all ages participate in the warm water pool in five ways:

1. Aquatic Physical Therapy – at the direction of their physician, the patient will work one-on-one with a physical therapist to achieve individualized goals. 86% of the pool's revenue comes from this source.
2. Maintenance Physical Therapy – a "step-down" program where a pool aide will assist the patient following formal physical therapy. 4% of the pool's revenue comes from this source.
3. "On-Your-Own" program – patients who have been discharged from physical therapy will be provided with a self-directed exercise program for use in the warm water therapy pool. For some patients, continued use of the facility will be short-lived, but for others it becomes a life-long commitment to maintaining their health and minimizing the effect of a chronic medical condition. 8% of the pool's revenue comes from this source.
4. Water Exercise Classes – NCHC provides structured classes, including Aquatics for Arthritis and Water Walking for those individuals who prefer, and are able to tolerate, an instructor-led group session. 2% of the pool's revenue comes from this source.
5. Mount View Care Center – patients of the nursing home began using the warm water pool in 2012, assisted by Mount View Care staff members and unpaid pool volunteers who act as aides. Nursing home patients suffering from Alzheimer's disease have found that the warm water pool helps improve cognitive abilities, mood, posture, and functional status. Less than 1% of the pool's revenue comes from this source.

Patients feel comfortable in the warm water pool as they are surrounded by others with similar medical conditions or disabilities. The temperature, pool depth, pool design, and handicapped features and are not duplicated by any other facility within a 150 mile radius of Wausau, Wisconsin.

Physical therapy patients have shared the following testimonials regarding NCHC Aquatic Services:

"My experience exceeded my expectations. I made exceptional gains in the pool which I doubt would have been possible otherwise." (Jean Burgener)

"At age 47, I found myself paralyzed from the chest down and after four months of land physical therapy, I began aquatic therapy at NCHC. When my therapy ended, I was encouraged to continue exercises on my own. At first I was so weak I had to have an attendant drive me to the pool and assist with showering, dressing, transferring, and getting up and down the wheelchair ramp. I have been using the pool six days per week for the past 21 years. The pool has kept me healthy and strong and is the only way I can exercise out of my wheelchair. It has provided with me independence, including the ability to drive, and kept me out of the hospital and nursing home!" (Dave Tlusty)

"After my car accident, I was simply recovering. Now after Aquatic Therapy, and using the pool, I am finally healing. Aquatic Therapy has given my three kids their mom back. I owe the pool and my therapists everything." (Courtney Pfeifer)

"My physician, Dr. Bart Isaacson, referred me to NCHC Aquatic Therapy for stiffness due to a foot injury and the need to strengthen the muscles in my back. I am especially grateful for the knowledgeable and helpful therapy personnel who treated me; I now continue using the therapy pool on my own. What an improvement in this 76 year old body! (Wally Lewitzke)

Physician Perspective

All aquatic programs require physician authorization/prescription. 199 physicians currently refer patients to NCHC Aquatic Services. During the past 18 months patients with 1,445 diagnoses were treated. The percentage by diagnosis was:

- 31% back pain/neck pain
- 21% extremity pain (joint and neurological)
- 19% arthritis
- 11% general weakness/balance issues/post-surgery
- 6% fibromyalgia/myalgia
- 6% diabetes, obesity, and related medical issues
- 6% other

Physicians have shared the following comments regarding NCHC Aquatic Services:

"Without the NCHC's warm water pool, many of my patients would lose their mobility, independence, ability to leave their home, and would not be able to live alone." (Dr. Erik Anderson, Aspirus Westhill Medical Specialists)

"I see patients with unique diagnoses that would not improve without the therapy pool. My best results (from the pool) are with my toughest patients. I have never had a patient "flunk" aquatic therapy. If the NCHC warm water pool failed to exist, we would see a functional decline in society that would need to get picked up by other County services." (Dr. Laurie Wolf, Acuity Neurology, S.C.)

"If the pool failed to exist, rehabilitation of my patients would take a huge step backward. We have a unique opportunity to enhance the health of people in Marathon County at NCHC." (Dr. Daniel Seybold, Orthopedic Associates of Wausau)

Health Care Cost Containment

The NCHC therapy pool provides health care cost containment by serving Marathon County's most vulnerable populations, including County residents with disabilities and the elderly. It is beneficial to patients and pool users who cannot tolerate (or have not responded to) traditional land-based physical therapy or exercise programs. The therapy pool helps individuals regain and/or maintain their

independence. Functional training allows many patients the ability to return to the workforce.

Specific health care cost containment examples include:

- Reduction of falls and fractures by focusing on gait and balance
- Provides morbidly obese patients with a tolerable form of exercise
- Stops the progression of existing health conditions and further complications through therapy and exercise
- Provides patients with resources to “take ownership” of their exercise regimen
- Helps avoid costly medical treatments, such as surgical intervention, where possible
- Reduces need for addictive pain medications by reducing pain scales

By promoting a healthier population, reductions in the cost of health care are passed onto Marathon County and its taxpayers.

MEASUREMENTS: MEDICAL OUTCOMES AND PATIENT/PHYSICIAN SATISFACTION

Medical Outcomes

Goals are developed for each patient by the physical therapist. Generally, they are some combination of comfort, range of motion, strength, weight loss, improved cardiac function, better balance/gait, decreased inflammation, reduction in edema, pain scale (reduction in pain), and increased confidence/morale.

Examples include patients who:

- Were reliant on a caregiver’s help to get dressed, but can now dress themselves
- Cannot “do stairs,” but is now able to walk up one flight.
- Are wheelchair-bound but want to maintain their ability to transfer to their bed or use bathroom facilities on their own
- Could only walk 50 feet without stopping, but can now walk a football field
- Was reliant on addictive prescription pain medication, but no longer needs it
- Have returned to work following an injury covered by workers compensation

From a pool user perspective, the following comments have been shared regarding medical outcomes from the “On-Your-Own” and water exercise user population:

"I had a lower lumbar spine fusion in 2009. Aquatic physical therapy allowed me to get back on my feet (literally). I use the warm water pool twice a week for strengthening and a good aerobic workout which would not be possible on land."

"I started coming to the pool 18 years ago. This is my lifeline to mobility. Wausau should be proud to have this therapy pool. It has also been a God-send for my grandson with Cerebral Palsy."

"I am able to maintain my strength and mobility with pool exercise which helps me cope with my rare and debilitating muscle disease."

"I have gained strength and mobility from using this facility. Didn't think I could even get here, but it's been a great help!"

"Because of the pool, stairs are easier and my balance has improved."

"The pool has given me back an active lifestyle. It is amazing."

"It is good therapy for my heart and knee. I feel a lot better after I use the warm water pool."

"Seven years ago my doctor suggested that I do pool therapy before I had a knee replacement and I have kept coming because it is easy exercise and beneficial."

"I have had 2 knee replacements and 2 hip replacements. The pool allows me to exercise with a range of motion not possible any other place."

"I have been coming for 7 years; it keeps me walking and able to enjoy life."

"I can do therapy in water that I cannot do on land. I wouldn't be able to move without the pool."

NCHC uses a "Quality Outcome Dashboard" to measure and monitor outcomes. For fiscal year 2012, two key measurements are pertinent to Medical Outcomes:

1. Percentage of Clients That Met Treatment Goals on Completion of Service: 91%.
2. Percentage of Customer Satisfaction: 96% rated satisfaction as "excellent" (which is the highest rating that can be provided).

Patient Satisfaction

Patients are asked to complete a survey following the completion of aquatic physical therapy. The care provided by the Aquatic Services staff received high rankings. However, due to the aging pool and locker rooms, categories which rank the facility received lower scores. Patients were asked to rate each of the following statements (excellent, good, fair, or poor). The percentage of EXCELLENT scores is as follows:

1. My physical therapist was courteous: 96%
2. All aquatic staff members were courteous: 86%
3. I was satisfied with the treatment provided by my physical therapists: 93%
4. My appointments for physical therapy were scheduled quickly: 92%
5. My physical therapist understood my problem or condition: 92%
6. The instructions my physical therapist gave me were helpful: 93%
7. I would recommend this facility to family or friends: 92%
8. I was satisfied with the cleanliness of the pool area: 78%
9. I was satisfied with the cleanliness of the locker rooms: 57%

Physician Satisfaction

In August, 2013, Physician Satisfaction Surveys were mailed to the 199 physicians currently referring patients to NCHC Aquatic Services. 93 surveys (representing a 48% return rate) were received. Questions asked, and the percentage of responses for each, follows:

1. Do you feel NCHC Aquatic Services programming is valuable to this community and meets the needs of some of your current patient population not served by other providers in the county?
100% Yes 0% No

2. Have you/would you refer a patient to Aquatic Services if they had the following diagnosis? Check all that could apply even if you do not have patients with these conditions in your practice.

92% Arthritis
91% Neck pain / Back pain
91% Generalized Weakness/ Balance Issues
88% Fibromyalgia/Myalgia
88% Extremity Pain (joint and neurological pain)
81% Cerebrovascular Accident (including stroke)
76% Neurological Deficiencies (E.g.: M.S., M.D., C.P., Spinal Cord Injury, & Spinal Bifida)
74% Neuropathy
66% Traumatic Brain/ Spinal Cord Injuries
58% Amputations

3. How likely are you to refer portions of your current patient population for aquatic physical therapy or independent use of the therapy pool?
(5=definitely, 1=rarely)

81% Definitely (5)
15% (4)
3% (3)
1% (2)
0% Rarely (1)

WHO ARE THE CURRENT USERS OF THE POOL?

NCHC Aquatic Services recently conducted a demographics survey. Of physical therapy patients, 87% were from Marathon County, and 13% from other counties in Wisconsin (and beyond).

For the "On-Your-Own" program, 95% were from Marathon County, and 5% from other Wisconsin counties.

The largest five-year age span of pool users is age 66-70. 72% of the user population is age 41-75.

The **Physician Perspective** section of this document lists the general categories of medical conditions treated in the pool: back pain/neck pain; extremity pain (joint and neurological); arthritis; general weakness/balance issues/post-surgery; fibromyalgia/myalgia; and diabetes, obesity, and related medical issues.

WHO ARE THE FUTURE USERS OF THE POOL?

There is no question that our population is aging. Utilization is expected to increase as age increases and overall health diminishes. Life expectancies are all increasing, and as such, people will become more focused on healthy lifestyles and maintaining their mobility.

TABLE 1

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA						
Table 1						
	2013	2015	2020	2025	2030	
Age	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Change 20 years
0-19	35931	35938	37011	38353	39289	109.3
20-34	26545	28423	27931	26885	26209	98.7
35-49	28601	26975	28324	30691	32497	113.6
50-64	26829	33023	29348	27736	26260	97.9
65-79	12890	15499	19060	22209	24423	189.5
80+	5914	6108	6490	7445	9196	155.5
	136710	145966	148164	153319	157874	115.5

Based on projections from the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of Marathon County between 65 and 79 will grow by 89.5% by 2030, and the population over age 80 will grow by 55.5%, compared with an anticipated growth in the county's population of 15.5%. Table 1 summarizes the anticipated changes.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) puts greater emphasis on "value-based purchasing," or in other words, greater emphasis on services that have a demonstrated impact on improving health and lowering overall healthcare costs. Aquatic physical therapy can provide the desired outcome as patients tend to improve more readily and are much less likely to be readmitted to the hospital.

Dr. Rick Reding, Medical Director of Aspirus Memory Clinic, has provided documentation of studies that show aquatic therapy is also beneficial in treating Alzheimer's patients. According to "Annuals of Long-Term Care," May 2013, it is estimated that 5.2 million Americans have Alzheimer's disease (AD) and one in three older adults dies with AD or other dementia. Presently, there is no cure for AD. Land-based exercises that involve aerobic activity, muscular strengthening, flexibility, and balance are not possible when an AD patient is nonambulatory. The aquatic environment provides buoyancy, allowing nonambulatory AD patients to

practice ambulatory and balancing skills. Studies prove that aquatic physical therapy improves AD patients' cognition, mood, posture, and functional status.

As noted in the **User Perspective**, patients of Mount View Care Center are using the pool on an increasing basis. Results similar to the study noted above have been documented. Rachel Riehle, NCHC Legacies by the Lake Life Enrichment Coordinator shared this observation: *"Our residents on Legacies by the Lake and Mount View love spending time in the pool. Their time in the pool plays such an important part in improving their mood and physical well-being – smiling, walking in the pool, talking with their peers and the volunteers, and playing ball. Not enough can be said about the importance of the connections our residents have been able to make with the pool volunteers and staff. These moments help them feel special and connected to their community. The North Central Health Care warm water pool is clearly immensely valuable to our residents and our community."*

NCHC is a "neutral" facility (not associated with any local/regional physician/hospital network) that offers many complimentary services to the elderly and disabled of Marathon County. The pool's affiliation with NCHC's psychiatric hospital expands reimbursement sources to include Medicare, Medicaid, and other third party insurance sources. Without such affiliation, insurance reimbursement would be limited.

The regional physician community indicates that NCHC Aquatic Services is a valued, essential resource that helps the disabled and elderly maintain or enhance their quality of life. It is impossible to measure dollars saved by maintaining or improving the quality of life. Nor is it possible to measure the increased financial burden on Marathon County if NCHC Aquatic Services did not exist and residents needed to rely on more costly County health services.

Delivery Options

Affiliation with Hospitals/Clinics

The Aquatic Services Warm Water Therapeutic Pool is associated with North Central Health Care and operates under the hospital license of the Psychiatric Hospital. It has no affiliation with Aspirus Wausau Hospital, Ministry St. Clare's Hospital in Weston, or the Marshfield Clinic yet receives referrals from all of them.

Unique Attributes of NCHC Aquatic Therapy Services

Accessibility

- ◆ Convenient parking near the entrance, including handicapped parking stalls.
- ◆ Separate men's and women's handicapped locker rooms.
- ◆ Grab bars throughout the locker and shower rooms.
- ◆ Mat table for changing.
- ◆ Hand held showers with safety chairs available.
- ◆ Unisex handicapped locker rooms with showers to allow caregivers to assist patients.
- ◆ Inclined wheelchair ramp.
- ◆ Three angular stairwells with hand rails.
- ◆ Hand rails on pool deck.
- ◆ Poolside seating for caregivers.

Other Delivery Options

1. Hospitals or other providers

There are no other Warm Water Therapy Pools within a 150-mile radius of Marathon County. The closest pool is in Madison, WI and is operated by the UW Sports Medicine Fitness Center. They are in the process of building an additional warm water therapy facility in the new UW Hospital under construction in the Madison suburb of Sun Prairie.

Locally St. Clare Hospital has a tank type exercise pool that is 6 ft. wide x 12 ft. long x 4 ft. deep. It is too small to provide the type of therapy provided by NCHC Aquatic Therapy Services.

There is an exercise pool in Green Bay supported by the Cerebral Palsy Association. It is a warm water pool but is primarily for exercise. They have

instructors to direct exercise classes but do not have physical therapists nor do they provide any therapy services.

Eau Claire, WI has a small therapy pool that will accommodate two or three people. It is primarily used for rehabilitation after accident or surgery.

Antigo and Wittenberg have warm water pools but they are recreational only. Neither provides any therapy services or handicap locker rooms.

2. YMCA

The YMCA has cool water pools with water temperatures approximately 80-82 degrees. The YMCA is not Medicare licensed and does not provide Aquatic therapy. The pools are primarily recreational with additional services for exercise and YMCA sponsored swim team.

The access for disabled and elderly persons is very difficult. They do not have a ramp access. The normal access is by using straight vertical ladders that are built into the wall.

3. Schools

The public school pools are primarily for classroom instruction and swim team. The pools are cool water with temperatures in the mid to low 80 degree range for classroom and in the mid to upper 70 degree range while swim team is in session.

Public swim is normally held before school starts and during evening hours after school and team events are finished. All public sessions are for exercise only with no physical therapy provided. Access to the pools is the vertical ladders built into the pool wall.

Financial Trends

In 2008 there was considerable discussion relating to the financial condition of the Aquatic Therapy Services program. As a result of those discussions the County Board provided a subsidy for the program. In January 2009, a Strategic Marketing Plan and Marketing Communication Plan were developed by a volunteer, Sue Gebhardt, with assistance from NCHC pool staff and executive management. Other friends of the pool (known as the "Warm Water Works" group) raised funds to pay for the various marketing materials that were designed to market the pool, specifically to area physicians. Over the past four years physician referrals have steadily increased. Table 2 tracks the increase in revenue and expenses over the last four years.

Table 2 – Revenue and Expenses

	Revenue		Expenses
	Gross	Net	
2009	\$387,140	\$279,170	\$495,470
2010	\$547,004	\$384,429	\$573,200
2011	\$879,868	\$607,865	\$596,619
2012	\$957,268	\$611,884	\$635,828
2013*	\$530,401	\$344,804	\$347,150
(*6 months)			

Over the last four years there has been a 141% increase in gross revenue and 119.2% increase in net revenue. The difference is due to contractual adjustments. In an effort to increase revenues from non-Medicare and Medicaid patients and price aquatic physical therapy services so they are commensurate with other land-based therapy services in our area, the average charge per service has increased by 76.3%, and physical therapy charges have increased by 107% during this same period of time. It is anticipated that there will continue to be growth in the amount recovered through insurance and Medicare. There has been a 32.8% increase in the number of clients and 58.4% increase in the number of client hours reflecting growth and intensity of services provided. Table 3 reflects the source of payment for the services.

Table 3
Payer Source

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013*	5 yr ave
Self Pay	14	7	7	7	7	8.4
Medicare	33	45	39	40	45	40.4
Medicaid	9	15	13	15	15	13.4
Insurance	37	29	38	34	27	33
Family Care	7	4	3	4	6	4.8
(* 6 months)						

There has also been a growth in the number of veterans utilizing the pool. Detailed financial information is available in Appendix 1 to the report.

Current Conditions

The pool building is approximately 9,430 square feet with the pool having a 3,120 square foot print. Most pools have a design life of approximately 25 years; NCHC's pool is 36 years old. In May 2013 Angus Young conducted an inspection of the pool building; their report found the following:

- Over the years the pool has developed leaks which have created voids under the pool deck and building foundation along the north and south wall.
- The framework of the glass portion of the building is rusted and most window seals have failed
- The coating on the electrical wiring has become brittle and breaking off causing electrical shorts
- There are locations where the concrete masonry unit has cracking on the inside of exterior wall
- The reinforcing in slabs supporting the concrete slab roof has started rusting
- The concrete in the pool equipment room is heavily deteriorated and the condition raised concerns over its structural integrity
- There is a need for interior and exterior repairs

A copy of their report "NCHC Pool Building Inspection Report" is attached in Appendix 4.

In addition to the structural issues there are concerns over the efficiency of the existing hot water heating system. Currently the steam that is used to heat to pool water is generated at the boiler plant in a different building and piped to the pool. The system is estimated to be 60% efficient. The air handling system is also very inefficient and outdated, making it very costly to keep the air temperature greater than the water temperature of 90 degrees, which is required by code.

The chemical pumps and auto readers are obsolete and have broken down in the past resulting in shutdowns at the pool. It is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain that system. Pools pumps and plumbing lines are beyond their design lives. Windows, doors and lockers are showing signs of deterioration due to the exposure to chlorine over the years.

There are a number of options that are available which include continuing to make repairs as needed; replacing the pool in its present location; or develop alternatives after evaluating the future needs of the pool and developing a design to meet those needs. That evaluation process should include discussions

with users groups including the medical community over their needs and developing alternatives to meet those needs. Questions relating to the size of the pool, depth, configuration, and costs should all be considered. Should the pool be reconstructed at its current location or somewhere else on the NCHC campus? If the pool were replaced at its current location what impact would the construction process have on patients, referrals and staff. The process would also include an evaluation of the capital and operational costs associated with each option.

Recommendation

Given the number of unknowns associated with the options and the limitations of the expertise of our members, the Task Force recommends that the County engage the services of professional design team with expertise in designing aquatic therapy pools to develop a Preliminary Design, Evaluation and Analysis of Options Report. The report would address issues relating to the appropriate size of the facility, design options and location and evaluate funding available to support these services in the future. It is estimated that the Report would cost approximately \$50,000. Once the Report is completed the County will be in a better position to make a decision on moving toward the replacement of the existing pool necessary to support aquatic therapy services.

There is significant interest in the community in ensuring that aquatic therapy services remain available in the future. Once the Report is complete and the options and costs have been developed, the community should be engaged in discussions about how to fund the capital improvements. Based on the feedback the Task Force has received we believe that there may be community interest in assisting with the funding of the project.