The Santa Barbara County Public Health Department Proudly Announces Dr. Charity Dean as Health Officer

The Board of Supervisors has approved Dr. Charity Dean as full-time Health Officer for Santa Barbara County. Dr. Dean assumed the role of Acting Health Officer when Dr. Takashi Wada was tasked to oversee the county’s Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Department in 2012 in addition to maintaining his responsibilities as Director of Public Health. Dr. Dean performed exceptionally well during this period as the lead on many significant public health actions.

Although Dr. Wada is now back full time with Public Health, the demands on the Health Officer role have increased substantially due to an increasing number of complex public health-related issues and having a dedicated full-time Health Officer has improved the efficiency of the Public Health Department’s response and decision making on operational issues. Dr. Takashi Wada continues as Director of the Public Health Department and Deputy Health Officer, allowing him to support the Health Officer on surge communicable disease incidents and operational activities. Dr. Wada provides leadership for the organization and Dr. Dean will continue to report directly to him.

Increases in emerging diseases and new trends in community based health are increasing the need for Health Officer capacity and expertise. Santa Barbara County has tuberculosis rates that are higher than California and a number of those cases are multi-drug resistant. In March of 2015, Santa Barbara County had a traveler from West Africa who developed a temperature requiring monitoring of the traveler, isolation from the community, a hospital stay in a facility prepared to provide Ebola level infection control, and laboratory testing. In the spring of this year, the County conducted a large-scale health care associated investigation of possible exposure to bloodborne viruses from a medical office that demanded daily consultation with the California Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The measles outbreak in California, meningitis cases, rising concerns around sexually transmitted infections and improving vaccination rates are other key issues requiring Health Officer attention. Successful public health outcomes and a safer community are made possible with the leadership of our Health Officer and Public Health Department Director.

Dr. Dean is actively engaged in health issues in our community. She is President of the California Tuberculosis Controllers’ Association, President-Elect of the Central Coast Medical Association, and member of CCLHO Communicable Disease Control and Prevention Committee.

Dr. Wada and Dr. Dean provide a unique and effective team that has a similar body of knowledge with specific areas of highly specialized expertise. Together they make a complementary team of physicians that enable the Public Health Department to be incredibly responsive and successful, as recognized by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.