

# Local COPD rate twice state average

By CRAIG FREILICH

The number of cases of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) in St. Lawrence County is nearly double the state rate, and deaths from stroke are 50 percent higher.

According to statistics compiled by the state Department of Health, there have been, on average, 76.1 hospitalizations for COPD per 10,000 county residents per year. The statewide average is 39.7 per 10,000. The state's goal by 2013 is 31.

Deaths due to stroke also stand out. In the county, the figure is at 44.3 deaths per year per 100,000 people; throughout the state, 30.5; and the goal for 2013 is 24, a little more than half of the county's current rate.

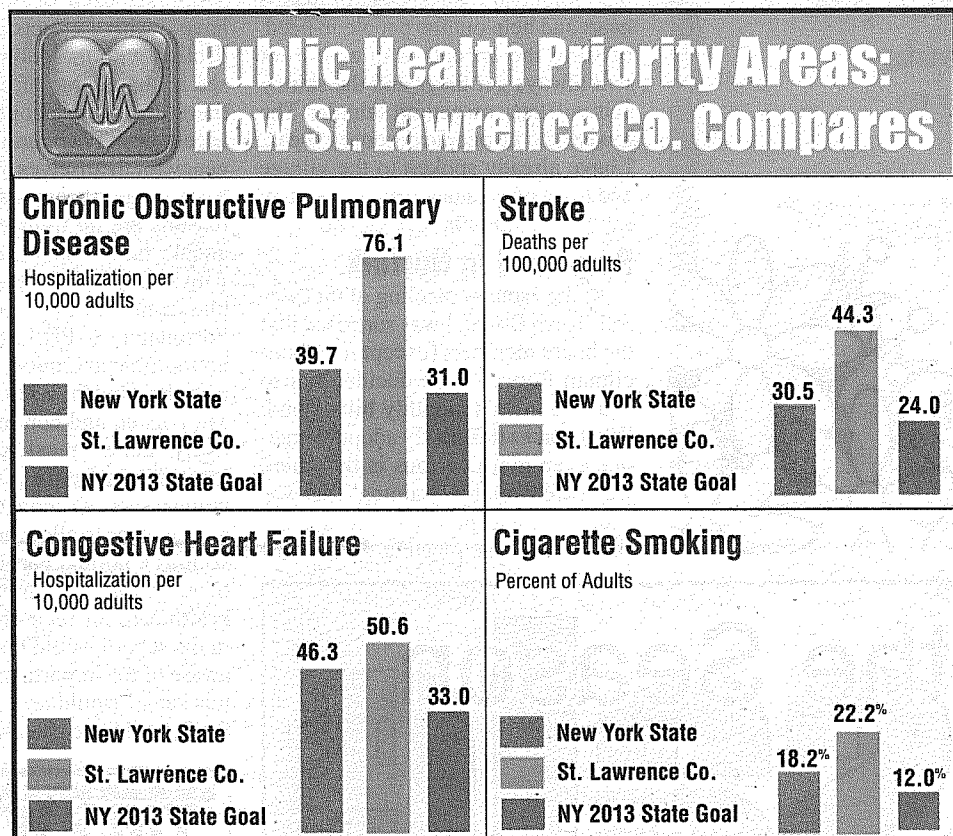
The rate of hospitalization for congestive heart failure is 50.6 per 10,000 county residents in a year; for the state as a whole, 46.3 per 10,000; and the goal is 33 by 2013.

"In St. Lawrence County, those three diseases all have a higher percentage than in the rest of the region," said county Public Health Director Susan Hathaway. "We will try to bring our rates in line."

## State Urging Lower Rates

With those statistics and a "Prevention Agenda" from the state Department of Health, the county Public Health Department is focusing on those conditions, along with congestive heart failure, tobacco use, and community preparedness, as priorities for improvement.

In a program called "Prevention Agenda 2013," the state Department of Health has set goals for improvement in those and other health indicators, and has asked counties to set their own priorities in finding ways to reach those goals.



Source: NYS Dept. of Health "Prevention Agenda"

"When we do a community health assessment, we gather information on our 'disease load' and see where the problems are," said county Public Health Director Susan Hathaway.

In deciding what the county should focus on, Hathaway said, several sets of statistics

from various sources were studied by the department, local hospitals, medical services, and the St. Lawrence County Health Initiative to "put together a pretty good picture of where we stand in the county."

With those figures, and a knowledgeable

Continued on page eight

## FROM PAGE ONE

### Health...

calculation of where the most improvement can be gained, the department has chosen to attack tobacco use and promote better management of the chronic diseases COPD, stroke, and congestive heart failure, while improving the county's ability to react effectively in times of disaster or other emergencies.

"The state wants us to conduct this over a three-year period and measure our performance — how are we doing, and are we making a difference?"

Hathaway said.

The county's rate of COPD — a disease characterized by permanently reduced lung function due to emphysema and bronchitis — stands out, at nearly double the state average and two and a half times the state goal.

### Higher Cigarette Usage

According to state Department of Health statistics, cigarette smoking, the chief factor in development of COPD, is practiced by 22.2 percent of adults in St. Lawrence County. Statewide, the tally is 18.2 percent of adults. The goal for 2013 is 12 percent.

"We took a look at the statistics and decided on these areas as our high priorities. Those figures tell us we want to make a change, and these were the issues we thought we could address and make a difference," Hathaway said.

Diseases such as COPD, congestive heart failure and stroke have been selected because they are chronic conditions that require constant attention and can result in repeated hospitalizations.

"We don't want to see people hospitalized again and again for the same thing," Hathaway said.

"We want to see every clinic attached to a hospital have education available for everyone who comes in. There will be posters and brochures so people will know about things like stroke and COPD."

Hathaway also said the county Public Health Initiative will have classes, and the Public Health Department will promote education with public health nurses as they go into homes.

"That's appropriate because their patients are frequently older, and older people are more likely to have many of the chronic problems we're trying to address."

### First Coordinated Effort

The setting of statewide goals for 2013 is the first time that state has asked localities for such a coordinated effort. Hathaway explained that the state has demanded Community Health Assessments every four years, "but 2009 was the first time the state had a 'prevention agenda' and asked us to have a cooperative agenda."

"Much of all this goes back to smoking," Hathaway said. "People who don't live a healthy lifestyle tend to have problems. It's all interconnected."

So the department and all sorts of health providers and organizations around the county will also be screening people for and educating people about problems associated with smoking, and getting cessation services for people "to get usage down. We have lacked cessation services. We've been relying on the New York Quitline, and we would like to develop more local resources. But getting people to quit smoking is very difficult. So it will be a cooperative effort, among hospitals, EMS, the Health Initiative, and St. Lawrence County Public Health."

Community preparedness became a priority for everyone after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and extending the lessons learned there to "any kind of emergency or disaster that would affect

people's health," Hathaway said, is worthy of attention.

An emergency preparedness group has been meeting once a month, she said, to review data, make plans, and set up drills. The most recent exercise has been the distribution of the H1N1 vaccine around the county.

The evaluations are due at the beginning of 2013. In the meantime, health officials will "develop baseline information and implement programs," Hathaway said. "We are still in the beginning phases on this."

"I have to tell you how pleased I am at the cooperative effort by hospitals, EMS personnel, Public Health, and the Health Initiative. Each group had its own tasks, and bringing health care people together to work toward common goals really adds value. I hope it makes a difference for St. Lawrence County."