

from the  
Executive Director



James T. (Jim)  
Currie, Ph.D.,  
Colonel, USA Ret.

### Expanding the Commissioned Corps: Providing More Opportunities for PHS Officers

It's pretty amazing what the last year has brought. At this time in 2018 we had been hit with an Office of Management and Budget threat to reduce the Commissioned Corps by a full thirty-eight percent, from 6500 officers to 4000 officers. The original budgetary proposal from earlier in the year had been to eliminate the Corps completely. These proposals were dropped in 2019, and we are now told by ADM Brett Giroir, Assistant Secretary for Health, of his plans to grow the active duty Corps to 7700 officers, while adding a 2500-officer reserve corps. We support both of these initiatives, which are interrelated. If ADM Giroir's proposal to create a large corps of qualified reserve

see **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR** on page 16

## Doggett Receives 2018 Congressional Public Health Leadership Award



In a ceremony in a small anteroom off the House Ways and Means Committee hearing room, CAPT Karen Muñoz presented the 2018 Congressional Public Health Leadership Award to Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D-TX). Doggett was selected over several other nominees and was recognized for his efforts to advance public health.

Rep. Doggett is the seventh recipient—and second Texan—to be honored by COA for their public health leadership on Capitol Hill. Rep. Doggett serves on the House Ways & Means Committee, which has jurisdiction over taxes, trade, Social Security, Medicare, and more. He is the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Tax Policy, with jurisdiction over issues relating to revenue measures. He also serves on the Subcommittee on Human Resources and the Subcommittee on Trade.

As the Chair and Founder of the House Affordable Prescription Drug Task Force, Representative Doggett is committed to bringing more oversight and transparency to drug pricing and supporting legislative and administrative solutions so that more families can afford the medicine they need. In addition, he has sponsored and co-sponsored scores of bills on issues ranging from the Stem Cell Therapeutic and Research Reauthorization Act that amends the Public Health Service Act to ensure the review of the state of science of using adult stem cells to develop new therapies, to the Advancing Hope Act, that amends the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to focus on rare pediatric disease medications.

Rep. Doggett was first elected to Congress in 1994 and received seventy-one percent of the vote in his 2018 re-election.

Also representing COA at the ceremony were Judith Rensberger, COA's Government Relations Director, and Jim Currie, COA Executive Director. Muñoz, a nurse officer who grew up in El Paso, TX, became COA Board Chair as of 1 July 2019.

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# COA Member Benefits

## Capitol Hill Representation

Efforts on Capitol Hill continually support all Commissioned Corps officers – active duty and retired

## Local Representation

COA Local Branches provide venues for meeting fellow officers and a forum for the discussion of issues within the Commissioned Corps

Newsletter reports on monthly activities and items of interest about the Corps & COA

## Insurance Programs

Low-cost insurance programs that may continue as long as your membership in COA remains current

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50 percent discount for the online MPH and certificate programs

## Scholarship Program

College scholarships for children and spouses of COA members

## Ribbon

Authorized to be worn on the PHS uniform by members in good standing when attending COA functions



## Legislative Update Are Russians Trolling Advocacy Groups?

by Judy Rensberger

Enterprising research by Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) has uncovered disquieting information suggesting that Russian trolls are targeting organizations that advocate on behalf of uniformed services personnel. VVA presented its findings to fellow members of The Military Coalition (TMC) during the Coalition's general meeting on 6 June. A preliminary, two-page summary of key findings was distributed at the meeting.

The lead author is Kristopher Goldsmith, VVA's Chief Investigator and Associate Director for Policy and Government Affairs. Kris said the full report, when completed, will run to several hundred pages. The plan is to release the report to Congress, federal agencies and the public, possibly as soon as August, in connection with congressional hearings on the topic.

### Targeted Groups Named

The two-page summary report identifies numerous non-governmental organizations that speak up for uniformed services personnel, both active-duty and retired. In addition to Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) itself, the list includes Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), and the Wounded Warrior Project. The list also includes two federal entities, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

and the U.S. Army Reserve. One United Nations agency, the U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, also made the list. COA was not on the list, nor was MOAA, NMFA, or TAPS, among other TMC partners with whom COA works most closely.

"American servicemembers, veterans and the organizations that represent them have been persistently targeted by hostile foreign entities in online environments for nefarious purposes," the report says. The VVA report adds new details to earlier stories in publications such as The Washington Post and Politico suggesting that Russia is targeting U.S. military personnel. Russians do this by channeling misinformation through Facebook and Twitter, and by falsifying websites that, to the casual observer, appear to be perfectly legitimate.

VVA began its investigation two years ago after stumbling across a fraudulent Facebook page and a website cleverly designed to look like theirs. Since then, VVA staffers say they have discovered hundreds of similarly deceptive websites and social media pages.

### VVA Call to Action

VVA's research is ongoing. The organization is reaching out to its TMC partners and asking for help in its efforts to get a bigger, better picture of Russian efforts to target the uniformed

see **LEGISLATIVE** continued on page 17

# Trauma Nurse Core Course Training

A two-day Trauma Nursing Core Course (TNCC) training took place on March 1-2, 2019, at the JBSA Camp Bullis, San Antonio, TX. The training offered students core-level trauma knowledge and psychomotor skills and built a firm foundation in trauma nursing. The TNCC course was designed to provide the ICE Health Service Corps (IHSC), Special Operation (Spec Ops) nurses with the cognitive knowledge and skills to better assess and treat trauma patients. The course included a lecture and hands-on skill stations covering assessment and treatment of the severely-injured patient. The training's objective was to empower nurses to systematically assess the trauma patient, to intervene and/or assist with interventions, and to provide evidence-based trauma nursing care within the context of a trauma team. The training team included one physician and ten nurses and included both active duty and civilian providers. None of the trainers were USPHS officers.

A day before the training started, participants had a face-to-face meeting with Chief of IHSC Special Operations, CAPT Félix A. Alicea (USPHS). CAPT Alicea gave us words of encouragement and highlighted how important the training would be for continuity of care and mission support. His words were, "You can do this, guys!" We felt motivated and fulfilled.

Special operations nurses are as important as regular, grounded nurses. Spec Ops nurses are trained to react appropriately to medical emergencies and care for the population we serve. Hence, this makes their role vital during a flight. A medical emergency that is quickly attended to by a medical provider who thinks critically can make a difference to a patient. It could become a matter of life and death. Medical care during air travel presents additional challenges. Turbulence aside, these nurses must handle medical emergencies with limited medical resources and the available expertise onboard. Moreover, the nearest



*From left, LT Jennifer Carrera, LCDR Bertholet Eugène, LT Steven Essien, and LTJG Steven Trevino attend Trauma Nursing Core Course training at JBSA Camp Bullis, San Antonio, TX*

hospital is likely to be many hours away.

With the challenges of mid-flight medical emergencies and many other pressuring factors that come into play, special operations nurses must execute the utmost patience and care while keeping their cool. The nurse also needs to be trained to develop suitable critical thinking skills required for inflight medical emergencies. Thus, there is no doubt of a flight nurse's importance.

The training class was filled with nurses from the Air Force, Army, and Navy. There were approximately forty total participants, of whom four were USPHS nurses. At the successful completion of the Trauma Nursing Core Course-Provider, successful nurses were presented with a certificate of completion by Emergency Nurses Association, earning a total of 17.65 contact hours, with categories designated to 17.65 hours of clinical, 17.65 hours of trauma, and 0.50 hours of pediatrics.

The event was a success. We reached our goal and were thankful to the experienced trainers who shared their expertise and experience with us. Overall, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with 100 percent of participants commenting

favorably on the experience. IHSC's mission includes special operations flights where IHSC personnel supervise the care of immigrants returning to their country of origin. After experiencing both the training and a special operations mission, I can attest to how the training experience built my confidence for transporting detainees internationally. My inaugural flight included transporting nearly sixty detainees with chronic medical conditions.

Responding to patients' needs and delivering optimal outcomes along the continuum of care demands a central focus on the patient. The goal of every healthcare organization providing care is for their medical providers to provide quality healthcare that is safe and equitability to their patients, as such, the need for measurable improvement in the quality of healthcare services is crucial. It is vital that quality improvement through staff training of this kind enhances safety, effectiveness, and efficiency as we continue to provide care to the populations we serve.

At the end of the training, we all showed our gratitude by thanking the Chief of IHSC Special Operations, CAPT Alicea,

see **TRAUMA** continued on page 17



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# Shiprock Service Unit: Ex Libris Project

by LT Courtney Wood, MEd, CCC-SLP

Many individuals take for granted the ease of access to literacy and language resources but do not appreciate how difficult access to reading materials may be. The *Ex Libris Project* (Latin for “from the books”) started after the Speech-Language Pathologist at Northern Navajo Medical Center conducted a few patient interviews to survey literacy resource access and availability and found that reading materials were scarce and difficult to acquire in the Shiprock Service Area. LT Courtney Wood, M. Ed., CCC-SLP, discovered at that time that many families who lived in Shiprock, NM, and the surrounding areas had difficulty accessing reading materials. The *Ex Libris Project* was developed to meet those needs by providing better access to quality reading materials to the population the Shiprock Service Unit attends.

Understanding that libraries often weed their stacks of lightly-used and popular books to make room for a change in inventory, LT Wood started the *Ex Libris Project* by reaching out to local public libraries and asking for book donations. Beginning in 2017, she created a proposal to area library staff and administration to persuade them to support her literacy initiative. By donating the books the libraries were withdrawing from their inventory to the communities in the Shiprock Service Area as an alternative to giving them to third-party distributors for reallocation, the administration and staff at the public libraries in Telluride, CO; Cortez, CO; and Durango, CO; as well as the leadership team at the Three Rivers Education Foundation in Farmington, NM, agreed to help provide quality reading materials that could launch and support a modest literacy promotion program at Northern Navajo Medical Center.

Soon enough, the humble program grew successful and required more hands to support and to promote. Starting in 2018, the *Ex Libris Project* required further assistance, and without missing a beat, fellow Commissioned Corps officers from the Northern Navajo Medical Center’s Rehabilitation Department; the Four Corners Regional Health Center Rehabilitation and Mental Health Departments; and the Pharmacy Department at the Dziłth-NA-O-Dith-Hle Health Center stepped up to help promote access and



availability to reading resources through this program. These fellow officers truly embodied both the pride and esprit d’corps of the Public Health Service.

Currently, the *Ex Libris Project* has distributed over 8,458 books to communities in the greater Shiprock Service Area. For 2019, LT Wood endeavors to distribute more than 10,000 books through this program and knows that her fellow Commissioned Corps officers will be there to help sponsor literacy in communities that will best benefit from the improved access and availability of quality books.

## Errata

In the May issue of Frontline, there were two articles related to RIST-NCR. The photos got mixed up.

The photo on page 13 should be on page 17 with the caption: “Deputy Team Commander Tara Bizjak (far right) with officers from RIST –NCR.” The top photo on page 17 should be on page 13 with the caption “From left: 2019 SOTUA Agency Representatives CAPT Sally Hu and CAPT Steve Formanski (Regional Emergency Coordinator, Region 3) at the USSS Multi Agency Coordination Center.” The photo on the bottom of page 17 should have the caption “NIST D officers at the Incident Management Training Seminar.” We appreciate CDR James Cowher, USPHS, RIST-NCR Public Communications Chair, for sharing the corrections.



## JOIN a COA COMMITTEE

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# October COA Board Chair

by CDR Heather Brake

Dear Colleagues,  
I wrote this column while I sat on the airplane flying back from what must have been one of the most powerful and inspiring weeks of the year for the Public Health Service. Listening to ADM Giroir talk about his passion and plan for the Commissioned Corps always renews my spirit and commitment to the work we do and our role in public health. It is my conviction that ADM Giroir believes in our service and that he is working hard with our leadership to create the best future possible for us.

But, the week was also bittersweet for me. Having been on the COA Board of Directors since 2013, it was hard for me to realize that my term was about to end. Though I wholeheartedly buy into ADM Giroir's vision, I am concerned about how HQ is going to accomplish everything with their current staff and budget levels. I am not sure what to think about the ready reserve, and quite frankly, I am worried about my category (veterinarian). Needless to say, I am leaving my term wishing that I could have done more.

No one could argue that the Commissioned Corps hasn't changed drastically over the last couple of decades. And, it seems like the changes are coming at record speed. I recently overheard one Captain say that our officers are expected to do so much more now than they have ever had to do before. Deployments, holding agency leadership positions, meeting weight and fitness standards, and somehow accumulating clinical hours seems impossible to take in all at once. Not to mention the added burdens for those of us who are parents or who are caring for parents and family members. It can be exhausting to even think about it.

If there is one thing I have learned during my term on the COA Board of Directors, it is that COA has done a tremendous job representing its officers over the years and will continue to do so. In just the last six years I have been on the board, COA has supported officers through changes brought about because of the Affordable Care Act, obtained discounts for our officers at Disney and Lowe's, and are currently fighting for recognition on the Smithsonian's Native American Veteran's memorial. COA truly has been protecting the interests of our officers.

COA is aware of the challenges facing our officers as they adapt to the policy changes in our service and will continue to listen to and advocate for its members. In order to become the service our leaders dream of, COA recognizes that there needs to be additional support for our officers in the areas of mental health, fitness, and finance, and of course, an understanding from our agencies that we may have to leave our posts temporarily for deployment. COA leadership is working with Commissioned Corps leadership on how best to support our officers in these areas.

On June 30, my term as COA Board Chair ended. If I could wish for anything going forward it would be these two things: that HQ recognize and utilize the strengths of the Commissioned Officers Association and Foundation to help achieve their objectives for the Corps; and second, that strong leaders like your upcoming Board Chair, CAPT Karen Munoz, continue to be brave enough to step forward and stand up for our officers as the Corps transitions into whatever it becomes in the future.

# Officer Attends Army Flight Surgeon Course

by CAPT Christian Rathke, LCDR Jesse McAllister

In February 2019, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration selected its first staff medical officer to attend the Army Flight Surgeon Course. LCDR Jesse McAllister was chosen to represent NOAA and the USPHS for this six-week long course held at the United States Army School of Aviation Medicine in Fort Rucker, AL. LCDR McAllister successfully completed the course and all its grueling requirements and is “expertly prepared to undertake the challenge of implementing the aviation medicine program at their unit.” The Flight Surgeon Course Mission Statement is to “Train joint and combined health care providers in the art and science of aviation medicine with special emphasis on current aeromedical policies and procedures”. That being said, LCDR McAllister now holds the responsibility of thousands of lives while performing these duties at the Aircraft Operations Command (AOC) division in Lakeland, FL. While his current duty assignment is with Marine Operations in Norfolk, VA, he is ready to operate out of NOAA’s AOC as necessary. “Already having a background in Aeromedical Evacuation/Flight Medicine during his time in Afghanistan with the Air Force, he was the perfect and most obvious candidate to represent NOAA. We’re grateful to have him as a versatile part of NOAA Aviation and Marine Operations,” said the Director, Office of Health Services, Captain Christian Rathke.

*Pictured: LCDR Jesse McAllister alongside the Director, Office of Health Services, CAPT Christian Rathke (CDR at time of picture).*



*Class 19-02, LCDR McAllister is 2nd row 5th from the left.*



# 2019 Symposium

by Jim Currie

The 54th USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium (Theme: “Better Health through Better Partnerships”) took place on 6-9 May at the Minneapolis Convention Center. Its attendance was the most ever at a Symposium, with more than 1300 registrants. Pre-symposium sessions such as leadership training and hands-on life-saving skills training took place on 5 and 6 May, while actual pre-Symposium activities had started several days earlier when numerous PHS officers—including Assistant Secretary for Health ADM Brett Giroir—volunteered for the Remote Area Medical (RAM) event. This RAM event took place at a Salvation Army shelter in Minneapolis, and from our observation and from talking with the RAM volunteers, it appeared that many indigent individuals were helped by the PHS officers and others there.

Monday evening was the annual Anchor & Caduceus Dinner, a dress-up affair where officers put on the finest uniforms and took part in the ritual of toasts and remembrances of officers no longer with us. The guest speaker for the event was Kathy Annette, President/CEO of the Blandin Foundation. Dancers and drummers from the Red Lake Nation provided entertainment and highlighted their culture.

Tuesday kicked-off with the APFT and the Surgeon General’s 5K Run/Walk at Veterans Park in nearby Richfield. The athletic part of the Symposium was followed by Category Mentoring and an all-day blood drive contest among categories. Indeed, the number of officers who wanted to give blood exceeded the number of places available. More Scientists donated blood, as a percentage of total numbers, than any other category, followed by Environmental Health Officers and Dietitians. All categories participated, and 97 people actually donated. The Red Cross had underestimated the potential turn-out among donors, and more than 100 people were turned away. The Red Cross estimated that the blood donated at the Symposium would



*CAPT Sara Newman donates blood and helps to raise awareness of sickle cell anemia (SCA) and other blood disorders. PACE will launch a new program dedicated to education around SCA.*

save 300 lives.

RADM (ret.) Sven Rodenbeck, President of the Foundation, kicked off the official opening of the Symposium. He was followed by Dan Buettner, a National Geographic explorer and journalist who delivered the Luther Terry lecture. Buettner’s widely praised talk described what he termed “Blue Zones,” where far more people than average lived to be centenarians.

COA held its annual meeting at noon on Tuesday. In a filled room (with some officers undoubtedly attracted by the box lunches), COA presented the 2019 Small Branch of the Year award to Fireweed COA of Alaska. The Greater New York COA received the 2019 Large Branch of the Year award. Ms. Penny Coppola was recognized for Outstanding Civilian Support of the Commissioned Corps and retired RADM Anne Schuchat was announced as the Health Leader of the Year. COA/COF Executive Director Jim Currie then delivered his usual fiery account of challenges faced by COA in the year since the last Symposium.

Scientific Track Sessions were followed later

in the afternoon by ADM Brett Giroir and VADM Jerome Adams, who talked about their vision for the Commissioned Corps.

A filled room of Symposium-goers were entertained on Tuesday evening by a wonderful concert from the USPHS Music Ensemble. The concert was an ambitious presentation by the amateur musicians and singers, and it was met with wide approval.

Wednesday started with a well-attended Retired Officers Breakfast at which Jim Currie provided an account of COA activities which directly affected retired officers. Wednesday was Category Day, a highlight of any Symposium.

Thursday started with both the MOLC (Minority Officers Liaison Council) and JOAG (Junior Officer Advisory Group) breakfasts and awards events. Both events had terrific turn-outs and enjoyed enthusiastic audiences. Thursday ended with the C. Everett Koop plenary lecture, delivered this year by Courtney Jordan Baechler and Gretchen Musicant. The title of the talk, “Better Health through Better Partnerships,” echoed the theme of the Symposium.



1

Photo by Kim Shen



2

Photo by Adam Whitem



6



8



3



9



4



7



5

1. ADM Brett Giroir and VADM Jerome Adams pose with fellow runners of the 2019 Surgeon General's 5K  
 2. The "Surgeon General's Own" plays a tune.  
 3. A member of the Red Lake Nation presents information about herbal remedies to officers in the Exhibit Hall.  
 4. CAPT Brian Lewis receives the USPHS Music Ensemble Founders' Award for consistently modeling the ideals of the Music Ensemble.  
 5. VADM Jerome Adams, RADM Erica Schwartz, and RADM Susan Orsega join CAPT Suzan Gordon and Dietitian officers of the USPHS Commissioned Corps on

Category Day.  
 6. ADM Brett Giroir, Assistant Secretary for Health, addresses the audience.  
 7. Runners start the 2019 Surgeon General's 5K in Richfield, Minnesota, on May 7.  
 8. A representative from Gilead talks with an officer about their products and services.  
 9. VADM Adams fields questions from officers during a plenary session with leaders from OASH and OSG.



10

Photo by Kun Shen



11



14



12

Photo by Kun Shen



15



13

Photo by Kun Shen

- 10. The USPHS Music Ensemble performs at the USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium in Minneapolis.
- 11. Pharmacists gather for a photo on Category Day.
- 12. CAPT Jim Minor, Ret., presents the COF Sustaining Supporter Award to Katie Walton and Steve Moore of Glaxo Smith Kline.
- 13. A packed audience listens to remarks from Dan Buettner on Blue Zones.
- 14. RADM Sven Rodenbeck, Ret., presents the COF Sustaining Supporter Award to Erin Williams of Public Health Reports.
- 15. Staff from sponsor 3M stand with RADM Erica Schwartz, Deputy Surgeon General, and RADM Susan Orsega, Director, Commissioned Corps Headquarters

# Southcentral Foundation Presents at Alaska American Physical Therapy Association Meeting



by CAPT Fred Lief, LCDR Kathryn Jacques, Elliot Davenport, DPT, and Katie Weathers, DPT

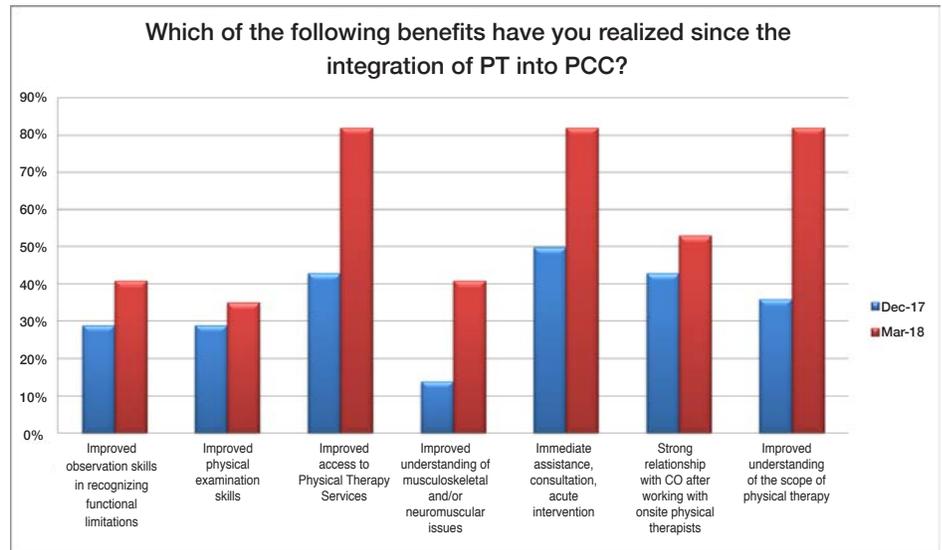
Physical therapists at Southcentral Foundation's (SCF) Physical Therapy and Exercise (PT&E) presented at Alaska's American Physical Therapy Association meeting on February 19, 2019. The PT&E department speakers included CAPT Fred Lief, DPT, LCDR Katie Jacques, DPT, and Elliot Davenport, DPT all of whom presented on SCF's recent initiative of integrating physical therapy into the primary care setting. Katie Weathers, DPT, a member of the PT&E department, organized the event.

LCDR Katie Jacques, clinical director, explained the unique concepts of Southcentral Foundation's Nuka System of Care and how integrating a full-time doctor of physical therapy into SCF's primary care supported this concept and became a natural progression of the other specialties already in place.

CAPT Fred Lief provided a brief history of how physical therapists have been utilized in integrated primary care settings across different health care systems, starting with the VA Salt Lake City Health Care System.

Elliot Davenport, DPT, explained the integrated physical therapist in primary care model being utilized at Southcentral Foundation. Specifically, he shared the concept that the physical therapist in the integrated model at SCF would screen a patient, known at SCF as a "customer-owner" for neuromusculoskeletal (NMSK) injuries versus more serious red flags, and then advise the primary care provider as to the best course of action regarding imaging and appropriate referral sourcing across the campus' specialty clinics. Dr. Davenport also shared the SCF integrated model where a medical provider might consult with a physical therapist about the customer-owner's injury (curbside consultation), treat the customer-owner simultaneously with the physical therapist (co-visit), or prefer to have the physical therapist screen the customer-owner by him/her self.

LDCR Jacques explained that the Nuka System of Care model emphasizes holistic health care, including physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness. While this model focuses on the relationship between the primary care provider (PCP) team and the customer-owner, SCF leadership recognized early on that other consultant-based professionals would need to be brought on to provide



on-site expert advice, guidance, and treatment to bring this holistic concept to fruition.

Each primary care clinic, for example, has access to an on-site behavioral health consultant, a doctorate-level pharmacist, and a nutritionist, to address immediate concerns or issues that might arise during an appointment between the customer-owner and his/her medical provider. The last missing piece involved how to best address NMSK issues that might arise during an office visit. The primary care physicians felt an integrated physical therapist would be best suited to diagnose difficult cases and give advice as to the most appropriate course of care.

This request spurred an improvement project in November 2017 called a Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) with the aim of investigating whether an integrated physical therapist in the primary care setting would be efficacious with several key markers of success. These markers included the following:

- Increased customer-owner satisfaction by bringing immediate access to physical medicine services to primary care
- Improved diagnoses of musculoskeletal pain complaints by having physical therapists collaborate with PCPs
- High utilization of physical therapy services in primary care
- Improved relationship between PCPs and outpatient physical therapists
- Improved understanding of physical therapy services

The graph shows the responses from primary care providers who interacted with the two physical therapists chosen for the pilot (CAPT Fred Lief, DPT and Elliot Davenport, DPT). The blue bar shows the response from December 2017--one month into the



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# PHS Officers Serve the San Diego Community: "Creek to Bay" Park Cleanup Event

by LT Hyun J. Jin, LCDR Sandra Duncan

On Saturday April 27, officers from the Commissioned Officers Association (COA) Southern California (SoCal) Branch participated in the "I Love a Clean San Diego" (ILACSD) 17th Annual Creek to Bay Cleanup event. The event was in honor of the global Earth Day on April 22. The event highlighted the importance of actively addressing pollution and waste that has a negative impact on the environment. An estimated 6,000 volunteers provided their services for Earth Day 2019 at 100 cleanup sites around San Diego County.

The "Creek to Bay" event is one of two annual countywide cleanups hosted by ILACSD that provides opportunities for thousands of local families, community groups, and local businesses to advocate and participate in creating a cleaner San Diego. The clean-up events sponsored by ILACSD have targeted hundreds of neighborhoods, parks, and open spaces on an ongoing basis throughout the year. According to their website, in 2017 ILACSD mobilized over 32,000 volunteers who removed half a million pounds of debris from San Diego County.

Based on the US Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) 2015 data, each American produces nearly 2,000 pounds of trash a year. In 2015 alone, the United States was responsible for approximately 262.4 million tons of trash. Marine debris has become one of the most recognized pollution problems in the world's oceans and watersheds. According to the EPA, approximately 60%-90 % of the debris source is generated from land-based sources. In choosing to volunteer for such a cause, the officers recognize that reducing watershed-based debris sources is an important management action for reducing marine debris. Furthermore, our officers were informed of the substantial financial burden to cities and public agencies responsible for managing debris.



Instead of remaining complacent or turning a blind eye to the abundance of litter across San Diego County, officers channeled their passion for service by actively engaging in an activity that contributed to protecting and further beautifying the San Diego's community. A total of seven USPHS officers and eight family members and friends participated in the event. As a team, the USPHS officers, family members, and friends removed trash from Marina View Park and surrounding streets and neighborhoods. Through their participation in this volunteer activity, the group was part of a larger collective effort to beautify the community and prevent trash from reaching coastal water bodies in San Diego County.

Participating officers included:

LT Juanj Wu, LT Marie Cetoute, CDR Song Lavalais, LCDR Annemarie Galie, LT

# Arctic Branch COA Lends a Hand during Fairbanks Clean Up Day



*(From L to R) CDR Wisner, CDR Holshoe, LCDR Robb, LT Genskow*



*CDR Wisner, LT Genskow, and Mr. Wisner collect trash along the Parks Highway in Fairbanks, AK*

by LT Kelly Genskow

Spring in Fairbanks, AK, can only mean one thing. No, not the arrival of flocks of mosquitoes and birds, it's Clean Up Day! Every year in May once winter has loosened its grip on the city and the snow has (mostly) melted, the Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce sets a weekend for everyone to get out and clean up the trash that has accumulated and hidden under the snow. Fairbanks Clean Up Day is a community-wide volunteer initiative that encourages residents to get outside and get excited about summer, while helping our environment and city look its best. Sponsoring organizations include the United Way of the Tanana Valley, the Department of Transportation: Adopt a Highway, Green Star of Interior Alaska, the Midnight Sun Council, Boy Scouts of America, Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce, Fairbanks North Star Borough Landfill, Explore Fairbanks and The Radio Station.

On May 11, 2019, officers from the Arctic COA joined over 2000 volunteers across the city in the quest for trash. Participants were CDR Joe Holshoe, LCDR Brian Robb, LT Kelly Genskow, CDR Stella Wisner, and her husband Mark. Volunteers were able to choose their own area to clean up, so at LCDR Robb's suggestion, we met near the back of the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus. We quickly filled a couple trash bags, but as another motivated group of volunteers was working just a short way up the road, we were soon done with our area. With neither us nor our yellow bags yet having our fill of trash, we decided to find another area to clean up. We moved to the nearby Parks Highway, joining several other groups who gratefully welcomed some extra sets of hands. Getting to meet other volunteers and share some laughs along the way made the task go quickly, and before we knew it, we were looking at a spotless stretch of road.

Braving traffic and mosquitoes, our combined groups were able to collect 2,600 pounds of trash over a six mile stretch of the highway, with far more collected city-wide. Mr. Wisner noted that it was inspiring to see so many people care enough about their city to take part in the clean-up. It was also wonderful to enjoy the camaraderie of working alongside other volunteers from around the city and to connect with the community. Overall, Clean Up Day was a great experience with a great outcome, and we can't wait until next year.

# Tuba City COA Works To Keep the Community Active

by LT Austin Van Horn, LT Rachel McBride, CDR Reasol Chino

The Grand Canyon Commissioned Officers Association had the pleasure of hosting our first Surgeon General's 5K run/walk at the Dinosaur Tracks in Tuba City, AZ, a city with a population of 8,611. When first deciding to host the 5K, we had no idea how many people to plan for, but we were confident that we could get the minimum of three participants required for the race. As we started to discuss ideas, we began to realize we wanted to do our best to engage the community. Knowing it would take a lot of heart, hustle, and muscle, we let the idea of what was best for the community be the driving force for all of our choices.

To start, we had to pick a venue. We had thought about having the race at a track or on the smaller roads in town, either of which would have been easy to do, but would have been less exciting for the community. We also considered many other locations and decided most of them were either too far away from town or have already been used by other events this year. Finally, we decided to have the event at the Dinosaur Tracks, a local landmark and unique racing location for Tuba City.

Once we decided on the event location, we started to push ourselves in advertising the race. We created a Facebook event, posted across the community, and started telling everyone we knew about it. We had no idea how many people would want to participate, but in order to make the event more appealing, we enlisted the help of a local DJ to provide music during the run. We also decided to have a table for Prevention through Active Community Engagement (PACE) in order to educate the community on the benefits of exercise, the importance of staying hydrated, how to maintain a balanced diet. We believed that having an education component to the event would further engage participants and encourage them to adopt healthy habits this summer.

Interest on the Facebook event began to pick up, and we quickly realized that this was going to be a larger event than we had initially planned for. We were thrilled and also a little nervous about planning and supporting a larger race. When online registration closed about two weeks before the 5K, we had 60 registered participants, but with the option to register the day of the race, we still weren't sure how many people to expect.

When race day finally arrived on May 9, Tuba City received an unseasonably large amount of rain and had to make the hard decision to postpone the event due to large puddles and the possibility of participants getting injured. We postponed the race to the following week and had no idea how many people to expect due to the last-minute date change.



*LT Jen Eng watches over racers as they finish*



*Back row, from left: LT Jen Eng, LT Rachel McBride, CDR Reasol Chino, PHS officer. Front row, from left: LT Austin Van Horn, LCDR Twyla Border, CDR Veronica Granger*



*Racers beginning the Tuba City Surgeon General's 5K*

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR** from page 1

officers is realized, there will be greater flexibility for you to deploy whenever and wherever you are needed, unlike today, when some supervisors are reluctant to allow you to deploy because there is no one standing by to fill in behind you. For those of you who are not in clinical billets, deployment is what distinguishes you from your civilian colleagues.

We at COA also think that you as serving officers should have greater choices as to where you are assigned. We think you should have opportunities to practice your skills in many more places than is now the case, including the Veterans Affairs Department and the US Department of Agriculture. We use these two cabinet-level departments as examples because we see them as worthy and likely venues where you all can practice your professional skills.

The VA is such an obvious place for you to serve that it begs the question to ask why there are not PHS officers there now. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Veterans Affairs Department and the Public Health Service was signed in the waning days of the Obama administration in January 2017. COA had been suggesting such for more than two years, so we were happy to see it signed, though it was only a modest proposal: 20 physicians and 10 nurses. That was January 2017. It is now July 2019, and we hear rumors that two physicians may be on their way to the VA. After two-and-one-half years. The VA has some 25,000 clinical vacancies, and former VA Secretary David Shulkin told me in a public forum that he would take 5000 PHS officers if he could get them. We have suggested that the MOA be expanded to include other specialties the VA needs, including therapists, dietitians, dentists, and others. Our suggestion has been met with silence, except when it has been met with whispered fears that if billets were opened for you all at the VA, PHS officers would flee the Indian Health Service and the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

We certainly do not want to see IHS harmed by allowing PHS officers to work at the VA. We think it is completely reasonable to require—as now seems to be the case from what we understand—that officers entering the Corps agree to serve first at either an Indian Health Service or Bureau of Prisons facility before they are allowed to transfer elsewhere. But we believe that veterans serving veterans is as high a calling as anything a PHS officer can do during their career. After you have served your initial tour, why shouldn't you be allowed to transfer to another organization, like the VA?

Why should our country's veterans be deprived of your skills and dedicated service? I confess that I don't have the same feelings about the Federal Bureau of Prisons. I know that PHS officers have served there since the 1930s, and I know that federal prisoners are entitled to appropriate healthcare, but if I were given a choice between opening up billets for you at a VA facility and requiring you to provide care to

those who have been convicted of federal crimes, I have no problem saying that you should be able to transfer out of the BOP.

Earlier this year we contacted PHS headquarters with some questions about the various Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) and Memoranda of Agreement (MOA) that PHS has signed with other organizations. We asked about the agreement with the US Department of Agriculture. It is very small and may have expired. We told HQ that they might consider renewing and expanding it, even to the point of allowing PHS veterinary officers to be assigned to Indian reservations through the USDA. We understand that veterinary officers within the Commissioned Corps are largely working outside their specialty, and there might be opportunities for them to practice veterinary medicine while advancing the nation's health and helping Native Americans. There is also a third existing—or perhaps expired—MOA/MOA with the Army' Corps of Engineers. We don't know the details of it, but we think it ought to be examined and revised as appropriate. PHS engineers are a unique asset, and our sense is that they would be welcome in many organizations.

We also asked about the proposed agreement among the PHS, the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS) and the VA. There was a tentative agreement reached several years ago under which the VA would pay USUHS for the education of up to 10 physicians per year. These medical students would be commissioned into the USPHS as ensigns, and when they graduated, they would owe the VA a certain number of years of service. It seemed like terrific idea to us, but unknown obstacles have stood in the way of signing and implementing the MOA.

I confess not to have much patience for people who are afraid to take strategic chances. One argument I heard about sending officers to the VA, for example, was along the lines of, "What if the VA decides it doesn't like a PHS officer and sends them back to us? What do we do then?" Let me understand this possibility: the VA has 25,000 clinical vacancies in its medical system. PHS sends a doc or nurse or therapist to them, and that person is so bad that the VA sends them back. Just how incompetent do you think someone would have to be before the VA would send them back? Do you really think that officer should remain in the Commissioned Corps? I believe you know my answer. This is nothing more than excuse-making, as far as I am concerned.

If we are going to grow the Commissioned Corps to 7700 active duty officers, as ADM Giroir wants to do, we need to be creative about where they are assigned. We need to look at where our country's needs are and where the skill sets of PHS officers can best be used. We think there are many opportunities that have not been fully explored, and we urge those who lead the Commissioned Corps to explore them.

**LEGISLATIVE** from page 2

services and their advocates: "If you see a suspicious account or website online that is made to look like it is a veteran or veteran organization, show it to us so that we can include it in our report."

The report warns that while interfering in U.S. elections is one major goal of Russian bad actors, it is not the only one. "Their activity and its effects are without interruption, and not limited by the United States' election calendar," the report says. Activities include perpetuating financial fraud, spreading anti-American propaganda, manipulating communities and groups, and inflaming national divisions.

**Congressional Interest**

In the U.S. House of Representatives, the Committee on Veterans' Affairs reportedly plans to hold a hearing in late summer or early fall. A bipartisan coalition in the House has asked the FBI to investigate.

VVA's report, though short, is notable for its careful referencing. This issue is not going away, and COA looks forward to working with VVA and other TMC partners to remain alert and stay abreast of new findings. As always, we invite your thoughts and suggestions.

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**TRAUMA** from page 3

for the opportunity this training provided to expand our skills. Also, we thanked him for the opportunity to learn and gain exposure through the training program, and we expressed how the skills we have learned will help catapult our success and instill confidence as we continue to perform patient care to the individuals we serve coming from different part of the world.

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LT Melaku Woldeamanual

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LCDR Jennifer J. Clements

### TUBA CITY from page 15

On May 15, 2019, the weather was spectacular, and we were all set for the 5K. Seven officers and ten community members volunteered on race day to perform various essential tasks, including marking the course, setting up registration, and acting as trail guides. As people started showing up, we were hopeful that our hard work would pay off and be enjoyable for the community. We were greatly pleased when we found out that 174 people ranging in age from a few months old in strollers, to 70+ years

old came to run, walk, and support the racers. The turnout was well beyond what we had believed possible when we started discussing this event; it was very encouraging to see so many people from such a broad age range and fitness levels exercising together and trying to be healthier.

After the race, many participants let us know how much they enjoyed the event and asked when the Grand Canyon COA was planning our next race. Community participants and volunteers are hopeful that we will host another event within a

few months. We even had some of the other race planners in the area let us know how well they thought it went and inform us they wanted to borrow some of our ideas.

It was an honor being able to serve the community and to be a part of such a successful event, which was significantly reinforced when the Surgeon General tweeted about the success of the event! We look forward to using what we learned to make our next race even better for the community.

# Phoenix and Navajo COA Partner to Hold 5K Event



Participation in the 5K has nearly doubled since COA sponsorship began

by LCDR Kelly Owens

The Phoenix Branch and Navajo Area Commissioned Officers Association (COA) joined together to sponsor the 4th Annual *Work Those QUADs 5K*, a Public Health Service Athletics event, held in Phoenix, Arizona on Saturday, April 1, 2019.

In 2016, Commissioned Officers recognized the desire to incorporate physical fitness into the Indian Health Service (IHS) Southwest Regional Continuing Pharmacy Education Meeting (the "QUAD"). This long-standing conference provides IHS Pharmacists with continuing education opportunities. In the spirit of embracing physical fitness as a Commissioned Corps tenet, this race was developed by Officers as an offering at the QUAD.

**SOUNTHCENTRAL** from page 11 project--and the red bar from March 2018.

As the graph illustrates, the PDSA resulted in improvements across all areas investigated, among PCPs and customer-owners alike. In addition, those customer-owners who were seen by an integrated physical therapist in primary care were 15% more likely to keep their appointment with outpatient physical therapy. Customer-owners responded positively to the experience of meeting with a physical therapist in primary care, with over 90% agreement with the statement that "the care received was valuable" and an equal agreement that the "medical provider understood their concerns or pain complaints". Customer-owners also had an overwhelming satisfaction with the information they received from the physical therapist and felt satisfied with the overall process of seeing the medical provider and physical therapist on the same day.

The physical therapy presenters shared with members of the Alaska Chapter of the American Physical Therapy Association the growing role physical therapists are playing in the health care arena.

The panel members concluded their presentation by announcing that the pilot was so successful that SCF leadership, under great



2019 top finishers holding prizes provided by Phoenix and Navajo COA

The race has steadily grown in the last four years, from fewer than twenty participants in the beginning to over forty this past year. The race has improved in large part because of contributions and support from the Phoenix Branch and Navajo Area COA. Their sponsorship since 2018 has enabled race organizers to provide refreshments and prizes for top finishers. This partnership has also provided an avenue for recruiting race volunteers, many of which are needed to hold a successful event.

Initially this event primarily targeted pharmacy officers, but with COA backing, it has now expanded to include participation from other categories including HSOs, nurses, and dieticians, as well as civilians.

encouragement from the medical providers, had decided to create one fulltime integrated physical therapist position in primary care. Based on the need to address the opioid crisis and chronic pain crisis affecting the Alaska Native population, SCF leadership decided that the physical therapist would be embedded with a primary care pain team that included a physical medicine and rehabilitation provider with specialized training in chronic pain and a PhD pain psychologist. In addition to normal screening duties, the physical therapist would consult with the pain team to devise an integrated approach to treating customer-owners with long-standing pain. They would report their findings back to the PCP with a recommended course of treatment.

In the few months since starting this program, the integrated physical therapist in primary care model at SCF has continued to meet expectations of medical employees and customer-owners alike. There is great hope and promise that the integrated primary care pain team will start to achieve similar success in curbing the national epidemic of over-utilization of opioids and ending the cycle of chronic pain that has devastated so many individuals and their families. The inclusion of physical therapists as part of the integrated model of care is something the physical therapy profession and Corps therapists can be proud of.

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