

2021 COA Award Recipients



LOCAL BRANCH LEADER OF THE YEAR

LT Rachel Forche

LT Forche has served as the Greater Texas COA (GTCOA) Secretary since 2019. Upon arrival to Dallas, LT Forche immediately engaged as a leader in the local COA community. Local COA leadership requested she serve a second term due to her exceptional skill and organizational aptitude. LT Forche displayed motivation and utilized her position to increase GTCOA membership and participation. Displaying creativity, she oversaw the first-ever GTCOA Newsletter and its continued success. LT Forche routinely demonstrates service beyond self and promotes camaraderie and esprit de corps among the officers in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.



HEALTH LEADER OF THE YEAR

RADM Michael Weahkee

RADM Weahkee is recognized for his notable contributions to the health of the nation, specifically to the American Indian and Alaska Native population. In addition, he dutifully represented the Commissioned Corps as a career officer in a key leadership position within the Department of Health and Human Services. RADM Weahkee is an enrolled member of the Zuni Tribe and administered a nationwide health care delivery program responsible for providing preventive, curative, and community health care for approximately 2.2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives in hospitals, clinics, and other settings throughout the United States.

see **COA AWARDS** continued on page 19

Officers Vaccinate Thousands in Philadelphia

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from the Executive Director



Jacqueline Rychnovsky,
PhD, RN, CPNP, FAANP
Captain (ret.), Nurse Corps, US Navy

Annual Business Meeting

It is usual practice for COA to hold our Annual Business Meeting during the USPHS Scientific & Training Symposium. Since we were not able to meet in person this year the meeting was held virtually on June 22.

After a warm welcome by CDR Kelly Valente, Chair-Elect of the COA Board of Directors, the meeting was turned over to RADM Brandon Taylor, the outgoing Chair. RADM Taylor reflected on the past year and thanked the Board of Directors for their service to the membership. He recalled many successes including the Executive Committee's focus on succession planning by establishing standard operating procedures and standardized committee reports, and a bylaws review with revisions to ensure compliance and growth. He celebrated our victory in preserving Commissioned Corps officers' annual leave which was so important considering the monumental number of deployments in support of COVID and the southern border mission.

see **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR** on page 18

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

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

Ribbon

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

Insurance Programs

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

USF Online Programs

Discounted degree and certificate programs like PhD, DrPH, MPH, MSPH, MHA

NYMC Online MPH

50 percent discount for the online MPH and certificate programs

Scholarship Program

College scholarships for children and spouses of COA members

USC Keck School of Medicine

Tuition discount for Master of Public Health degree

The Ohio State University

In-state tuition for graduate nursing and certification programs



Legislative Update Public Health Infrastructure Proposal Deserves Support

by Judith Rensberger, MS, MPH

Senate Bill 674, the “Public Health Infrastructure Saves Lives Act,” was introduced on March 10 by Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), with 19 of her Democratic colleagues as co-sponsors. The bill was immediately referred to the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions.

We enthusiastically reported on this bill in the March issue of *Frontline*.

Since then, however, the bill has all but disappeared. There has been no indication of possible amendments, no sign of additional support, and no discernible movement. As of this writing, there is no companion bill in the House.

This is discouraging.

S.674 is a modest, bread-and-butter proposal. It would enhance public health infrastructure by awarding competitive grants to health departments across the country. Although state and local health departments are the backbone of public health, too many of them are chronically understaffed and underfunded. This makes it difficult to confront new and emerging public health threats in an organized and systematic way. The COVID-19 pandemic shined a light on the need for more public health infrastructure and was the major impetus behind this bill.

When we first reported on this bill, we did so with a fair degree of optimism. What is happening right now is hard to say. However, one thing seems clear to me: some Republican support

could surely help. It could help to nudge this bill out of committee and then over the finish line.

Beyond the outcome regarding this bill, there remains the need for future bipartisan support on other bills and other issues. This is a hard truth that will always be with us. We may think public health is the most bipartisan issue imaginable, and we may think that all right-thinking people should agree with us. But in the political arena, it is never that simple.

A major challenge for COA’s reconstituted Legislative Affairs Committee and its new chair will be to help COA define a clear path through this thicket. Please share your thoughts and suggestions with me at Jrensberger@coausphs.org.

COA is asking all members to call or e-mail each of their two U.S. Senators. Explain that you are a USPHS officer and say something like this:

“If you already have decided to support Senate bill 674, then I want to thank you! If not, please consider supporting it. This bill would strengthen public health infrastructure by awarding competitive grants to health departments in our state and across the country. State and local health departments are the backbone of public health, but many are underfunded. This makes it hard to confront public health threats such as COVID-19 and its mutations.”

Contact information for your Senators can be found at www.senate.gov/senators/index.htm

2021 USPHS Excellence in Public Health Pharmacy Award

by CDR Sadhna Khatri, CDR Trang Tran, and LCDR Daniil

Marchuk

The prestigious USPHS Excellence in Public Health Pharmacy Award was established by the Pharmacist Professional Advisory Committee (PharmPAC) Student Awards Program to encourage student pharmacists to become active in public health. Over the years, this award program has significantly grown in its capacity, outreach, and recognition of pharmacy students across the entire Nation.

This unparalleled award recognizes outstanding pharmacy students who have made significant contributions to public health by promoting and advancing wellness and healthy communities. Students are evaluated on their contributions towards voluntary health-related services, emerging public health issues, or contributions that advance the goals of Healthy People 2030 or the National Prevention Strategy.

This year, the PharmPAC Student Awards Program team has shown incredible dedication and resilience in response to the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite challenges, the team worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure timely solicitation and review of award nominations, communications with pharmacy schools regarding the award recipients, and solicitation of volunteer award presenters. This team consists of seven members who made this year's program a remarkable success: CDR Sadhna Khatri, CDR Trang Tran, LCDR Daniil Marchuk, LCDR Christine Corser, LCDR Chaltu Wakijra, LCDR Sally Doan, and LT Sylvia Park.

In 2021, the program recognized 89 pharmacy students from across the country as the recipients of this distinguished award. Their efforts advanced the goals of Healthy People 2030 and addressed the priorities of the Surgeon General. This involves a variety of public health-related matters such as addressing the COVID-19 pandemic, opioid epidemic, substance use disorders, and living a healthy and tobacco-free life. Others addressed promoting community health and economic prosperity, increasing awareness of the importance of oral health, and providing services to eliminate disparities and improve the health of all members of their communities.



From left to right, top to bottom: Joel A. Gardea Beltran (Texas A&M University Health Science Center Irma Lerma Rangel College of Pharmacy), Stephanie Hendricks (Purdue University College of Pharmacy), Kristine Hoang (Lipscomb University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences), Jacob Jordan (Idaho State University College of Pharmacy), Lucas Kosobuski (University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy), Samantha Lewiston (University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Pharmacy), Tyler Pitcock (University of Kentucky College of Pharmacy), Isabelle Sviatoslavsky (Medical College of Wisconsin School of Pharmacy), William Campillo Terrazas (University of Texas at El Paso School of Pharmacy), and Margaret A. Underwood (Oregon State University College of Pharmacy).

Of those students, the awards program selected the top ten recipients for their public health work that positively impacted their local communities and beyond. Historically, the top ten award recipients would be recognized by the Chief Pharmacy Officer at the American Pharmacists Association annual meeting. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's top ten award recipients will be featured during the November 2021 Joint Federal Pharmacy Seminar. In addition, these recipients are currently featured on the Student Awards website.

Congratulations to all 2021 USPHS Excellence in Public Health Pharmacy Award recipients. Thank you to all team members of the PharmPAC Student Awards Program for their leadership, hard work, dedication, and flexibility during this challenging time.

Recruit Exhibitors for 2022 Annual Meeting

by John J. DiMaggio, MBA

One of the efforts led by the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF) is offering free registration for junior officers and civil servants to attend the annual USPHS Scientific & Training Symposium. To do so, COF recruits exhibitors to offset the meeting production costs.

Please help COF to recruit exhibitors for the 2022 meeting, which will be held on May 23-27, at the Renaissance Phoenix Glendale Hotel in Arizona.

Perhaps you know or work with someone in any of the following disciplines:

- Industry (pharmaceuticals, medical/surgical devices, biopharma, diagnostics, IT, wholesale trade, medical supplies, financial, retail, etc.)
- Academia (public health, medicine, pharmacy, nursing, physician assistant, dentistry, engineering, veterinary, dietitian, psychology, etc.)
- Government agencies hiring staff
- Government agencies promoting programs
- Patient advocacy organizations
- Healthcare advocacy organizations
- Healthcare systems, especially in Arizona and southwestern states
- Any business seeking contracts from federal health agencies

If you know someone in any of the disciplines listed above, then please reach out to them. Mention the annual meeting, dates in May and location in Arizona. Please direct them to www.phscof.org/sponsors--exhibitors for rates and registration details.

The following members of our Planning Committee are available to assist:

- Tim O'Neill (Annual Meeting Planning) timo@leading-edge.us
- CAPT Jacqueline Rychnovsky (COF Executive Director) jrychnovsky@coausphs.org
- John DiMaggio JDIMaggio@USWorldMeds.com
- CAPT James Minor jminor101422@gmail.com
- Karen Watkins kwatkin1@its.jnj.com
- Ron Walters ron.walters@cookmedical.com

We are excited to begin planning for our 2022 USPHS Scientific & Training Symposium in Arizona. If you know someone who supplies goods and services to USPHS Commissioned Corps officers, or who supports and advocates for the advancement of public health, then please:

1. Let them know about our annual USPHS Scientific & Training Symposium.
2. Invite them to exhibit.
3. Direct them to www.phscof.org/sponsors--exhibitors for more information.
4. Reach out to our Planning Committee for guidance.

Your personal donation to COF can also help to support free registration for junior officers and civil servants. You can provide a tax-deductible contribution by visiting: www.phscof.org/donate.

Many thanks for your service to the United States of America. We appreciate your dedication to protect and advance public health! We look forward to seeing you in Arizona.



USPHS
SCIENTIFIC & TRAINING
SYMPOSIUM

COA Member Receives Lifetime Achievement Award from ATSU-ASDOH

by Jason Hunsicker, Social Media & Public Relations Manager, ATSU

A.T. Still University-Arizona School of Dentistry & Oral Health's (ATSU-ASDOH) George Blue Spruce Jr., DDS, MPH, assistant dean, American Indian affairs, received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation Awards for Excellence in Social Mission in Health Professions Education.

"ATSU congratulates Dr. Blue Spruce on his award and recognition," said ATSU President Craig Phelps, DO, '84. "Dr. Blue Spruce's service to our country and the dental profession is unparalleled. ATSU is honored to recognize him and Mrs. Blue Spruce on this special occasion."

The award was originally announced in 2020 and presented virtually in April 2021 during the Beyond Flexner conference, co-hosted by A.T. Still University and Arizona State University's Edson College of Nursing and Health Innovation.

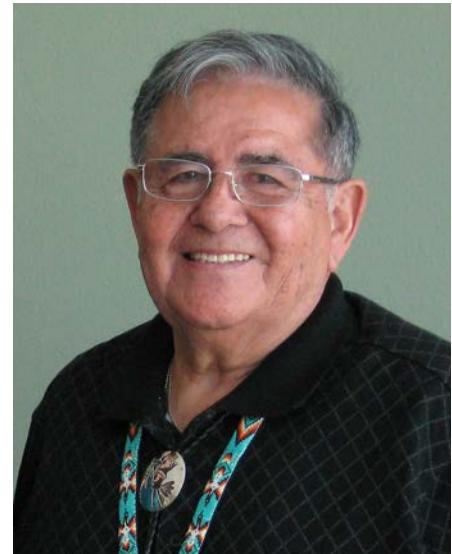
"(Dr. Blue Spruce)...has been recognized as the first American Indian dentist in the United States, and realizes that as a trailblazer he bears the responsibility of illuminating the health professions pathway for American Indian and Alaska Native children who are unaware this path exists," said an announcement by the Milken Institute School of Public Health at George Washington University and the Beyond Flexner Alliance. "He has dared American

Indian and Alaska Native individuals to recognize the importance of dentistry, and his unique leadership has left a legacy of promoting social mission in health professions education."

Dr. Blue Spruce, a member of the Laguna/Ohkay-Owingeh Pueblos of New Mexico, was born and raised at Santa Fe Indian School in New Mexico, where his parents were on faculty. He graduated as valedictorian of his 1949 class at St. Michael's High School in Santa Fe, received his doctor of dental surgery degree in 1956 from Creighton University School of Dentistry in Omaha, and received his master of public health degree in 1967 from University of California, Berkeley School of Public Health. In 1984, he received Creighton's highest alumni award, the Alumni Achievement Citation.

Dr. Blue Spruce served two years in the U.S. Navy and provided dental care to the crew of the USS Nautilus, the world's first nuclear-powered submarine. Dr. Blue Spruce later joined and spent 28 years in the U.S. Public Health Service, with 21 of those years in the American Indian Health Service, where he attained the title of assistant surgeon general and director of the Indian Health Service Phoenix Area Office, serving the 42 tribes of Utah, Nevada, and Arizona.

In 1990, he was instrumental in founding the Society of American Indian Dentists



George Blue Spruce Jr., DDS, MPH, assistant dean, American Indian affairs

and served as its president for 16 years. The position allowed Dr. Blue Spruce to continue his life's work in the encouragement of American Indian individuals to pursue a career in dentistry and other health professions. He holds membership in numerous American Indian organizations, with missions to promote post-secondary education and healthcare careers. Dr. Blue Spruce was also the first male tennis player inducted into the American Indian Athletic Hall of Fame in 1996.

His autobiography, "Searching for My Destiny," was published in 2009 by University of Nebraska Press.



Board of Directors

Fair Winds from Outgoing Chair

by RADM Brandon L. Taylor, PharmD,
BCPS

As the COA board of directors prepares to begin a new fiscal year and new board member terms are set to begin while others' terms end, I pause to reflect on the past year. I am personally grateful for the directors' service to you, our members. We have worked hard on your behalf to advocate on matters of significance and the challenges and concerns you have shared. We focused on longevity and succession planning by establishing standard operating procedures for each of our committees so when committee leadership turns over, there is a guidance document in place to ensure smooth transition. The executive committee implemented standardized reporting for each of the committees to improve efficiency and encourage committees to be purposeful in their activities and accomplishments.

We have assessed past practices and evaluated our bylaws to ensure that we are doing what we are supposed to be doing. The executive committee authorized the hiring of a consultant to assist COA with getting language added to a bill to extend leave balance carryover beyond 60 days last year. This might be considered our paramount win for the year. Efforts

for similar language to be added to a bill for this year as the pandemic has continued and added the southern border missions and deployments had continued to affect officers' abilities to use leave. Make no mistake, the leave extension from last year was due exclusively to COA's actions.

Perhaps most importantly, we have tried to adjust historical practices with what we have learned from the pandemic. We have known that our members want to engage with one another. Although the pandemic led to two years without a USPHS Symposium, we recognized several ways to convene members.

We began a series of events we called Gatherings. Each has featured a current or past Corps officer leader. We have been fortunate "to sit the feet" of featured current or past Corps leaders, including ADM Brett Giroir, 16th Assistant Secretary for Health; VADM Richard Carmona, 17th Surgeon General; RADM (ret) Boris Lushniak, former Acting Surgeon General and Deputy Surgeon General; RADM (ret) Scott Giberson, former Acting Deputy Surgeon General and Director of Commissioned Corps Headquarters; RADM (ret) Anne Schuchat, CDC Principal Deputy Director; and RADM (ret) Kenneth Moritsugu, former Acting

Surgeon General and Deputy Surgeon General. We have been inspired, uplifted, and instructed.

Other engagements included two Open Mic Nights where the talents of many officers were on full display. We also made one-on-one contact with our members who had a lapse in membership. As a result, we saw a nice increase in our membership numbers; however, there is still much work to encourage and invite all officers to join our association. We need every officer on board to help us continue to fight the good fight on behalf of the interests of our members.

I express my personal gratitude for this past year's executive committee: CDR Kelly Valente, chair elect; CDR Kristie Purdy, treasurer; and CAPT Karen Munoz, immediate past chair, for their selfless and dedicated service to you.

Please join me in expressing gratitude for our executive director, Jacque Rychnovsky. She has been a breath of fresh air, a huge support to the board, and visionary leader in her own right for the entire association.

I'm thrilled for what COA will do next under the leadership of the new executive committee.

Fair winds.

Officers Vaccinate Thousands in Philadelphia

by CDR Karen Russell, MPH, MHS, PA-C

In response to President Biden's mission to vaccinate 100 million Americans in 100 days, federally supported Community Vaccination Centers sprung up rapidly around the nation. The US Public Health Service Task Force-18 (TF-18) Philadelphia Vaccination Deployment Team (March 9 through April 10, 2021) was the first PHS team to establish a presence at the Center City Vaccination Site in Philadelphia. The TF-18 members, including many COA members, came from the Washington, DC, area and as far away as Illinois, Missouri and California. Under the direction of FEMA, TF-18 participated in the joint vaccination operation along with FEMA staff, the Department of Defense, and numerous Pennsylvania and Philadelphia emergency management and health department entities, as well as a cadre of volunteers. Later, we were joined by a contingent from the Pennsylvania National Guard. The vaccination site, located at the Pennsylvania Convention Center (PCC), is a joint-federal Type-1 Community Vaccination Center pilot site established to distribute over 6,000 COVID-19 vaccinations per day in an efficient, effective, and equitable manner.

As the Officer in Charge assigned by Commissioned Corps Headquarters, I led our 11-member PHS Team, comprised of seven nurses, one nurse practitioner (NP), one physician assistant (PA) and two pharmacists. The two pharmacists oversaw the process of vaccine reconstitution and dose preparation with the goal of providing vaccinators adequate doses while minimizing vaccine waste. The pharmacy drew up the vaccine doses in syringes that Marine corpsmen delivered to each vaccination table staffed by Navy and Marine corpsmen and our own PHS vaccinators. Our PHS team provided vaccinations and the NP and PA served as members of the site triage team evaluating eligibility, answering questions posed by those about to be vaccinated, and monitoring the observation area to detect any adverse reactions.

The PCC site was set up to efficiently accommodate a large crowd with adequate social distancing and designed to allow optimal flow of the public - initially screened outdoors, then registered at tables inside the spacious arena, provided their vaccinations, and finally, instructed to wait in a post-vaccination observation area. Those receiving vaccinations were pleased with the well-oiled machine.



DC COA member LT Theresa Yu, RN, MSN, OCN



Golden Gate COA member LT Eric Heinze, RN

By the end of our deployment, nearly 240,000 COVID-19 vaccine jabs had been provided.

This rewarding deployment provided an opportunity for our PHS officers to work collaboratively with a multi-faceted team to accomplish the mission of vaccinating a large percentage of those most in need in Philadelphia.

CAPT Mary Lambert Named Director of Community Health

by Jacqueline Rychnovsky, PhD, RN, Executive Director

Chattanooga Mayor Tim Kelly announced his senior leadership team in May, drawing together a diverse group of experienced leaders from the private, public, and nonprofit sectors to execute his vision for a city that works for everyone. Joining his team as Director of Community Health is retired CAPT Mary Lambert, DNP, FAAN, a COA life member who has also served as Chair of the COA Board of Directors and a Trustee of the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF).

During CAPT Lambert's time as a nurse officer in the U.S. Army and U.S. Public Health Service, she served in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Health, the White House, the Food and Drug Administration, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention before retiring in 2012. She was deployed in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks and in response to the U.S. Capitol anthrax exposure. She currently serves as an associate professor at Vanderbilt University School of Nursing and has advised Chattanooga's COVID-19 response.

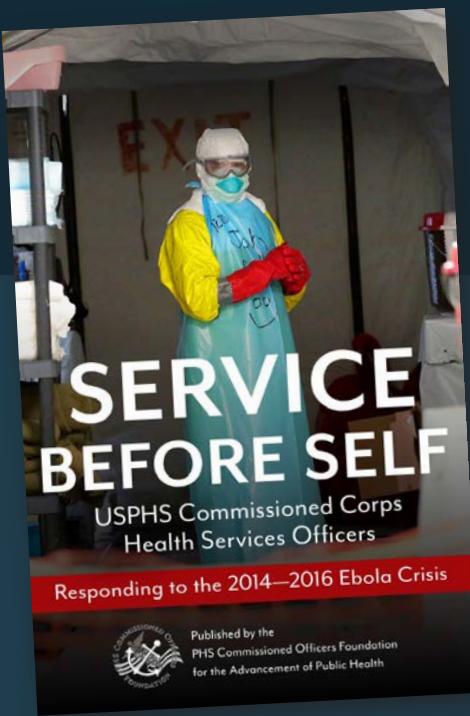
"Dr. Lambert is one of our nation's most experienced and thoughtful public health leaders and we are very fortunate to have her in our community," said Kelly. "Naming an experienced leader to this important position was one of my top priorities and I am looking forward to working with Dr. Lambert to ensure the public is involved in public health."

In 2015, retired CAPT Lambert received the Retired Public Health Service (PHS) Officer Recognition Award from the Black Commissioned Officers Advisory Group (BCOAG) which recognizes retired African-American PHS Commissioned Corps Officers for exemplary service to the PHS Commissioned Corps and the Nation.

As Director of Community Health, Dr. Lambert will establish an Office of Community Health for Chattanooga. COA and COF congratulates Dr. Lambert on this prestigious appointment.



CAPT Mary Lambert



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“Service Before Self’ documents one of the USPHS emergency responses to a public health emergency and is a must read for anyone interested in the history and capabilities of our Corps.”

- RADM (ret.) Sven Rodenbeck



Groundbreaking for Fort Carson Intrepid Spirit Center

by LCDR Courtney Wood, MEd,
CCC-SLP

Evans Army Community Hospital and the Warrior Recovery Center held a groundbreaking ceremony to commence the construction of the Intrepid Spirit Center on May 13, 2021.

Many civilian and active-duty service members attended the event.

Distinguished guests speaking at the ceremony were Mr. David Winters of the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund; MG Matthew McFarlane, Commanding General for 4th Infantry Division at Fort Carson; BG Shan Bagby, Commanding General for the Regional Health Command-Central; COL Kevin Bass, Commander for the Evans Army Community Hospital; CAPT Alicia Souvignier, Director of the Warrior Recovery Center; CSM AJ Q. Santos, Command Sergeant Major for Evans Army Community Hospital; and SSG (ret) Spencer Milo, a service member who shared his story about how much he had benefitted from Intrepid Spirit Center services.

The Fort Carson Intrepid Spirit Center is a collaborative effort between the Department of Defense and the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund. Their combined work will support ten ISCs across the country. Fort Carson is the ninth Intrepid Spirit Center to be built. The mission of the Intrepid Spirit Centers is to provide evaluation, treatment, and rehabilitation services for service-members who have experienced traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress, sleep disorders, and behavioral health issues through a variety of rehabilitative avenues. Rehabilitation can include occupational, physical, and speech therapy as well as music and art therapy. Fort Carson was chosen as



The Warrior Recovery Center Team is ready to move forward with expanding facilities and care for service members in the Pikes Peak region.



CAPT Alicia Souvignier, Director for the Warrior Recovery Center, provides vision for the Fort Carson Intrepid Spirit Center mission to improve services for the at-risk traumatic brain injury population.

an Intrepid Spirit site due to the at-risk populations stationed in the local area, such as the 4th Infantry Division and 10th Special Forces Group.

Once built, the 25,000 square foot facility will house the Warrior Recovery Center, which has five USPHS officers currently serving as a part of the team.

Moreover, the building will provide more space for professionals and providers to deliver additional medical, rehabilitative, and programmatic amenities for service members in the Pikes Peak region. Building for this structure is scheduled to be completed by summer 2022.

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primary care through preceptorship
and the KySS mental health fellowship**



The Importance of Maintaining COA Membership

by LCDR Folasade (Sade) Kembi, PhD, MPH, Outgoing Chair, COA Outreach Committee

Despite the numerous benefits of USPHS COA membership, some officers either never saw the value or failed to renew their membership, forgetting that associations gain strength in numbers. The more officers, the more influence our association will have. Please speak with your colleagues and share some of the invaluable COA benefits listed below.

Leadership and networking: COA provides opportunities to grow and develop skills as a leader. Join a network of over 94 local branches and connect with fellow officers. Volunteer for committees or serve in positions that expose you to a broad array of health professionals in the USPHS. COA local branches also give back to the community, providing needed assistance and service at shelters, food banks, etc.

Professional development: Fellowships and scholarships are available to COA members and their families. Examples are the RADM Michael Fellowship, Mishoe Scholarship for high school students, and discounts for certificate and degree programs. Saving money on continuing education is a strong return on the investment of COA dues.

Discount to USPHS Symposium:
As a junior officer, I took advantage

of the discounted rate to attend the annual USPHS Scientific training and Symposium. Meeting with colleagues in the hallways and hearing directly from USPHS leaders led to learning about HHS policies and procedures, deployment readiness standards, and strategies to prepare for promotion. Attending was a chance to build camaraderie among officers and earn valuable continuing education credits. Every junior officer should join COA and use the discounted registration rate.

Group insurance: Our day-to-day work and role as America's Health Responders are stressful. We work long hours and often overlook caring for ourselves and our families. COA has your back. Members can participate in a low-cost group insurance program with plans for long term care, auto and home, pet health insurance, emergency assistance, term life, senior term life, and group term life insurance. Check out coainsurance.com for details.

Representation on Capitol Hill: This remains the most important reason why officers join. COA is our voice with elected and HHS officials. Thanks to COA, USPHS officers have whistleblower protections, can transfer Post-9/11 GI benefits to dependents, and receive



LCDR Folasade Kembi, PhD, MPH

greater parity with other uniformed services when it comes to federal agencies or private companies.

If you receive *Frontline*, then you are probably sold on COA membership. Thank you and please maintain your membership. Set a goal of speaking with one colleague a month about the value of COA membership. Use this article for talking points.

Please remember a larger COA will translate into more effective representation for our uniformed service, careers, and the health of the public.

COA Executive Director Earns Certified Association Executive Credential



The American Society of Association Executives has announced that Jacqueline Rychnovsky, COA's Executive Director, has earned the Certified Association Executive (CAE®) designation. The CAE is the highest professional credential in the association industry.

To be designated as a Certified Association Executive, an applicant must have experience with nonprofit organization management, complete a minimum of 100 hours of specialized professional development, pass a stringent examination in association management, and pledge to uphold a code of ethics. To maintain the certification, individuals must undertake ongoing professional development and activities in association and

nonprofit management. More than 4,700 association professionals currently hold the CAE credential. The CAE Program is accredited by the National Commissioned for Certifying Agencies (NCCA).

"I was delighted to hear that Jacque recently obtained her Certified Association Executive (CAE)" said CDR Kelly Valente, COA's Board of Directors Chair. "A CAE credential is a marker of a committed association professional who has demonstrated a wide range of knowledge essential to manage an association like ours. Having a credentialed leader allows COA and COF to stand out amongst our sister organizations and is something all COA members should be proud of. Congratulations to Jacque."



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2021 Mishoe Scholarship Awarded to Priya Kalra

by Lynn Abrahamson, MPH, RN, Grants Manager

The PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF) is pleased to announce the 2021 recipient of the RADM Helena O. Mishoe "Believe" Scholarship – Priya Kalra.

The scholarship program was established by RADM Mishoe to support the career dreams of high school seniors. Her extraordinary public service and scientist career spanned more than three decades at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and included 27 years of active duty in the USPHS Commissioned Corps.

This scholarship continues her legacy as someone who fosters the dreams of those who have shown resiliency in overcoming challenges and who have an expressed desire to make an impact in the sciences or a health-related field. Candidates for the scholarship are assessed on strength of character, a commitment to community service, and leadership potential.

Priya Kalra, this year's scholarship recipient, plans to become a Biomedical Engineer. In her scholarship essay, she addressed the lack of females in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields and her efforts to introduce other young women to these disciplines. For instance, she taught coding skills during a week-long camp at her local library. According to Priya's high school robotics coach, she also launched an initiative at Children's National Hospital in Washington, DC, where young patients had an opportunity to drive the team's robot and participate in activities to learn more about the robotics program. As someone who is "extremely passionate about the lack of females in STEM fields," Priya plans to help close the gender gap in college by working with young girls to foster their interest in these areas.



Her participation in community organizations has also been considerable. Priya is active in the South Asian Youth Volunteer Association (SAYA), which provides tools for young people to thrive academically, professionally, and personally. As the head fundraising intern for SAYA, Priya helped raise over \$3,000 for school supplies to underserved students. Other involvements include twelve years in the Girl Scouts, working at a local homeless shelter, and serving as the Club founder and President of the local Girl Up Club. Priya is also a member of the school field hockey team and practices Tae Kwon Do.

Morgan DeShazer and Christiana Armstrong were awarded honorable mentions and will receive certificates of achievement. To learn how to donate to the Mishoe Scholarship fund, please visit <https://www.phscof.org/mishoe-believe-scholarship.html>.

CCHQ Announces Policy Updates

In May, the Commissioned Corps Headquarters (CCHQ) announced the update of four policies, three related to readiness standards, along with a fourth policy regarding entry into the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps.

Personnel Operations Memorandum (POM) 821.29, "Entry Grade on Appointment" was updated. This policy establishes the guidelines for determining a candidate's grade upon appointment to the Regular Corps and Ready Reserve Corps. Questions can be directed to OS-CADQuestions@hhs.gov.

Next, due to the new requirement for officers to report their weight on an annual basis, POM 821.66 was revised. This policy, titled "Retention Weight Standards," requires Public Health Service

officers who are below the minimum or exceed the maximum body mass index limits outlined in Commissioned Corps Instruction (CCI) 241.01, "Readiness and Duty Requirements," to submit additional documentation. Additionally, POM 821.71, "Physical Examination Requirements" also underwent modifications to update readiness policies.

Lastly, POM 821.75, "Readiness Compliance" was revised to communicate expectations more clearly for what officers must do to become Basic Qualified and maintain readiness. The revision of this POM is now more specific on the consequences of being "Not Qualified" for monthly readiness checks.

All questions related to these policies should be directed to CCHQ at PHSReadiness@hhs.gov.

Bill Haffner Receives ACOG Lifetime Achievement Award

by Jacqueline Rychnovsky, PhD, RN, Executive Director

Captain (ret.) William Haffner, M.D., a COA member for over 50 years, received the prestigious Luella Klein Lifetime Achievement Award from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists at the 2021 ACOG Annual Clinical and Scientific Meeting. CAPT Haffner served as a member of the COA Board of Directors from 1990-1997 and 2005-2011 and the COF Board of Trustees from 2005-2011 and 2012-2018. He is a Professor Emeritus at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS), Editor Emeritus of the journal Military Medicine, and Chair Emeritus of the ACOG Committee on AI/AN Women's Health. While serving in the U.S. Public Health Service, CAPT Haffner was the Chief, Obstetrics and Gynecology and Clinical Director at Gallup Indian Medical Center, attending Physician at the National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) and Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, residency director of NNMC and USUHS, Chair of the USUHS Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, and served as the Chief Medical Officer of the U.S. Public Health Service from 1990-1994. He retired from the USPHS in 2001.



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ADDRESSING THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF COMMISSIONED CORPS OFFICERS

Spiritual Wellness

by LCDR Katrina Redman, MT, SPOC, MDiv, Chaplain(BGCT)



The Problem with Contamination

Have you heard the term “salty” recently? It is currently being used everywhere to describe a person who becomes suddenly annoyed, irritated, hostile, or angry with someone. I think that it is safe to say that many of us, and those around us, could be described as “salty” lately. It is unavoidable. However, it is not a healthy state of mind to remain in.

I have been thinking on this lately. I heard a sermon in which the pastor discussed the purity of salt. You may not know this, but salt (NaCl) can vary greatly in its purity. The pastor said that the salt that is the closest to the rock and is being washed over by water yields the highest levels of purity. Why is purity important? Salt that is impure loses its potency to preserve things. Salt has been used for ages to preserve food which sustains life. Impure salt would do a poor job of keeping food safe, and it could make you sick instead.

In light of this information, it seems important to discuss how we keep ourselves spiritually pure. If contaminated salt could make people sick, how spiritually “sick” could we make ourselves by being irritated, annoyed, or hostile? Remaining in a spiritually unhealthy state has devastating consequences for ourselves and those around us. It leads to moral decay, and it makes us treat each other horribly. It also has negative effects on our own physical and mental well-being.

So how do we keep from being contaminated and making others “sick”? We stay close to the source of our strength (the rock), and we nourish our spirit with those words (the water) that uplift, encourage, and purify us when we get contaminated by a bad mood.

There is such a high standard that we uphold as Commissioned Corps officers. If we are to be viewed as the examples of health for our nation and the world, we cannot afford to be “salty.” We are human, however, and this will happen. The challenge for us is to recognize it as soon as possible and work to correct it. Our health depends on it!

May we all seek to stay spiritually pure, for our own health and the well-being of others.

Education: Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrians emphasize purity by wearing a white undershirt as a constant reminder. They also wear a white belt called a kustis when they pray to symbolize being bound to their religion and their community.

Spiritual Exercises

1. Think about the last time that you felt irritated or hostile. How did that feeling affect those around you?
2. Find out what your belief system says about the importance of spiritual purity.
3. Learn more about Zoroastrianism at <https://www.uri.org/kids/world-religions/zoroastrianism>
4. Try meditations at <https://catholicexchange.com/10-meditations-to-help-you-attain-purity-of-heart>

Questions or comments? Contact me at khredman@hotmail.com.

JULY COA GATHERING

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WHO

VADM Vivek Murthy, M.D., the 21st Surgeon General of the United States, and RADM Joan Hunter, R.N.

DATE

Tuesday, July 20th, 2021

TIME

7:00 PM ET

REGISTER

<https://tinyurl.com/julycoagathering>



Big Sky COA Motivates Officers and Supports Community with Push-Up and Plank Challenges



Big Sky COA members gather in person.



Big Sky COA members LT Danielle Tofte, LCDR Zach Pool, and CDR Brian Molloy deliver a donation to The Center Pole.

by LT J.J. Doherty, RN and LT Julie Witmer, RN

Montana is the Treasure State, known for western mountains and eastern plains and nicknamed "Big Sky Country." Montana tends to slip under the radar and quietly go about its business. Big Sky COA, the only COA branch in the state of Montana, is following suit and quietly getting things done. Despite having officers spread out across hundreds of miles and serving in remote areas, Big Sky COA works to build camaraderie and encourage officers to be physically fit. During quarantine, we got creative, and officers worked together to motivate each other, build strength, and give back to the community.

In November 2020, 13 officers and two family members participated in the first Big Sky COA Push-Up Challenge. The Surgeon General's Initiatives representative in Big Sky COA is stationed over 100 miles from any other USPHS officer in Montana and coordinated the challenge for the group.

It takes innovation and collaboration to overcome the dark winter months and stay motivated. The push-up challenge was just the event to encourage each other at a distance. Over the 30-day period, the officers and civilians that participated completed a total of 10,827 push-ups. Five officers—LT Felicia Charles, LCDR William 'Chris' Charles, LT Stephen Friedman, LT Jason Krumbeck and LT Julie Witmer—completed over 1,000 push-ups each.

In a bid to increase officer competition and promote inclusivity with neighboring South Dakota, LT J.J. Doherty included officers from Black Hills COA. LCDR Chris Charles and LT Sara Lout accrued 1,771 push-ups for their team.

In a motivational e-mail to the group, LT Witmer suggested the next challenge would include planks. She was not serious at the time, but several officers took interest, so in February, Big Sky

COA completed a Plans-for-a-Purpose challenge where the group tallied minutes of planks completed throughout the month with an overall goal of increasing core strength. The participants secured sponsors from family and friends for each minute they completed. Officers wanted to make a difference not just for themselves, but for others as well. Participants, including retired CAPT Nonie Woolf, completed 381 minutes of plank time.

The Big Sky COA donated \$250, and the plank participants raised \$771 for a total donation of \$1,021 to The Center Pole, a non-profit organization located on the Crow Indian Reservation. The Center Pole leads projects to strengthen the Crow community by teaching and modeling entrepreneurship and guiding youth development. Learn more at thecenterpole.org.

The plank challenge helped LT Doherty achieve her APFT goal. She noted, "I finished the week with 2.5 minutes for my APFT. That's a huge improvement for me! Thank you, Plank Challenge!"

In one motivational message to Big Sky COA members, President LT Danielle Tofte wrote, "Start with small increments and just keep trying to do them longer with a gradual increase. Incorporate into other workouts. And yes, think about other stuff. It's crazy how fast our bodies can adjust!"

Learning from George Hood, world record holder for planking, LT Friedman wrote, "Don't watch the timer. A minute is very long when you count every second!"

Big Sky COA members will continue to work together to improve their strength and to help the community. The group looks forward to continuing annual push-up and plank challenges as well as other fitness events. In Montana, we treasure our core and Corps strength. We may be off the radar, but there is a lot to cover in Big Sky Country.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR from page 1

He reviewed the incredible speakers we were able to host for our monthly COA Gatherings and the two open-mic nights we hosted to improve morale and esprit de corps. RADM Taylor concluded his remarks by thanking our outgoing Immediate Past-Chair, CAPT Karen Munoz, for the “amazing insight, experience, and leadership that she’s provided our association and its members,” as well as congratulating CDR Valente on her upcoming term.

CDR Valente then addressed the membership, focusing on an updated strategic plan and encouraging all members to take the membership survey. “We really need to come together to ensure that our organization heads in the direction of your best interests. We are ready to get to work, but we do ask for your help.”

Treasurer CDR Kristie Purdy reviewed COA’s financials which demonstrate a sound and strong financial position, along with a completed and clean audit with no discrepancies or deficiencies.

CAPT Jill Shugart, Chair of the Awards Committee, announced the annual COA Awards which are nicely summarized in a separate article in this issue of Frontline. The recipient of the Health Leader of the Year Award, RADM Michael Weahkee, presented inspirational remarks. “This past year has been a trying one for us all. And I am extremely proud of the hardworking men and women...This award is accepted in recognition of all their hard work, dedication, and personal sacrifice to achieve the mission of the Indian Health Service to raise the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level. It has truly taken an all of government approach to contend with this COVID pandemic and to ensure the continuity of services for the vulnerable population that we serve. I’m humbled to have played a small part in this past year’s efforts.”

RADM Taylor thanked the outgoing members of the Board of Directors, CAPT Jill Shugart, CAPT Julie Niven, LCDR Sade Kemb, CDR Brad Cunningham and CAPT (ret.) Dean Coppola, noting that COA is stronger due to their service. CDR Valente announced the new positions on the Executive Committee, with the Chair-Elect being CDR Kristie Purdy and CDR Katie Jacques as Treasurer. Five new members of the Board of Directors were welcomed, LCDR James Gooch, LCDR Kurt Kesteloot, LCDR Julia Zucco, CAPT Margaret Riggs, and CAPT (ret.) Susanne Caviness.

As we look back on this year in review, I am grateful for the COA staff who work sun-up to sun-down to meet the needs of our

members. In addition to saving expiring leave and hosting more than 3,500 officers this year at various COA Gatherings, virtual Category Days, and the virtual Surgeon General’s 5K race, we also celebrated new wins and efficiencies.

The Commissioned Officers Association:

- Successfully advocated on your behalf to allow Commissioned Corps officers to participate (in uniform) in the nationwide Wreaths Across America event which occurs each December.
- Received approval for our Board of Directors Chair to attend the Veterans Day Memorial event at Arlington National Cemetery (in uniform), where this past year RADM Taylor was able to chat with Secretary Azar about the importance of having Public Health Service Commissioned Corps officers acknowledged on the National Native American Veterans Memorial.
- Received a commitment from the Veterans Administration that retired and former female PHS officers will be eligible for the 2022 annual VA Center for Women’s Trailblazer campaign recognition.
- Successfully advocated to attend the Open House at the Officer Basic Course, where we have been able to share the value of COA to newly commissioned officers since April 2021.
- Proposed a bylaws amendment to allow COA membership to Ready Reserve officers; additionally, we have created an opportunity for Ready Reserve officers to serve on the Board of Directors. These bylaws changes will be sent for a vote soon, so be on the lookout.
- Transitioned our headquarters to a 100% virtual environment to reduce rent which will free up funds for increased advocacy and membership marketing.

You can access a recording anytime by visiting the COA website. Under the “Events” tab you can access both the recording and the presentation.

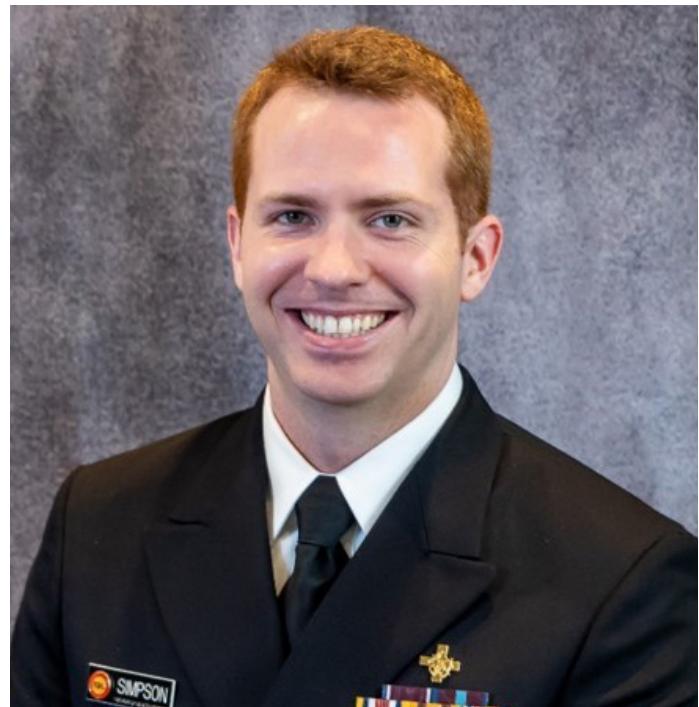
COA remains the only association dedicated solely to represent the interests of PHS Commissioned Corps officers and has been proudly protecting your interests since 1951. We need your help though! Thank you for renewing your membership, sharing your incredible volunteer spirit, and maintaining your passion as America’s Health Responders.

COA AWARDS from page 1

LOCAL BRANCH MEMBER OF THE YEAR

LCDR Michael Simpson

LCDR Simpson is recognized for his continuing support of the DC COA branch. He volunteers as a Montgomery County science fair judge and solicits fellow officers to participate. To increase USPHS visibility, LCDR Simpson launched and has grown use of a USPHS license plate and golf ball markers. He combined the DC COA summer picnic with a ropes course, developing confidence and esprit de corps. He contributes to the Dining Out and Bowling Committees and serves as DC COA's historian where he led a major revamp of the public photo gallery.



LCDR Michael Simpson

LOCAL SMALL BRANCH OF THE YEAR

Heart of America COA Branch

Throughout the pandemic barriers and ongoing deployments, the Heart of America branch grew membership, provided educational sessions, and gave back to the community. The branch hosted resiliency training and a military etiquette refresher. They sorted and packaged donations at food kitchens, organized a virtual promotion ceremony and mentor night, hosted a writing seminar, and created apparel for distribution nationwide. The branch also participated in Wreaths Across America.

CIVILIAN OUTSTANDING SUPPORT OF THE COMMISSIONED CORPS

PHS Personnel and Career Management Branch (Mr. Larry Reeves, Ms. Mary Boone, Ms. Lisa Duhart, Ms. Shanae Robinson, Ms. Evelyn Palm, and Ms. Shruti Muri)

The Civilians of the Personnel and Career Management Branch follow approximately 6,400 officers' careers. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, this six-person team went above and beyond to assist with an increased workload when two PHS officers were deployed. The group cross trained to ensure there wasn't a single point of failure which resulted in PHS officers in the field receiving timely responses to concerns and no lapse in processes that would affect PHS officers for promotion. Their selflessness, flexibility, professionalism, and outstanding execution of Commissioned Corps Headquarters mission during the COVID-19 pandemic directly impacted all PHS officers.



Heart of America COA Branch



Heart of America COA Branch volunteers to package food.

Junior Officer Spotlight

LT Courtney Jones, PT, DPT

Board Certified Clinical Specialist in Orthopaedic Physical Therapy

by LCDR James P. Corcoran, PT, DPT, FAAOMPT

Stationed at Fort Bragg, NC, LT Courtney Jones is a Physical Therapist in support of the Army. In addition to her clinical caseload, LT Jones has implemented three process improvement initiatives in the past year, which yielded the successful merging of two clinics into one space, increasing patients encounters. She is driven to learn highly specialized care and hone skills through self-directed education and on the job training, as evidenced through advanced certification in vestibular rehabilitation, process improvement, deployment readiness, and serving as a member of the Opioid Task Force. Through direct patient care and in leading process improvement initiatives regarding utilization, LT Jones increased total number of patient encounters by 58%. She has presented information about patient care to colleagues and to middle school students and teachers. LT Jones excelled in basic life support training, earning instructor status in order to more efficiently serve her 56-member department in meeting BLS requirements for staff.



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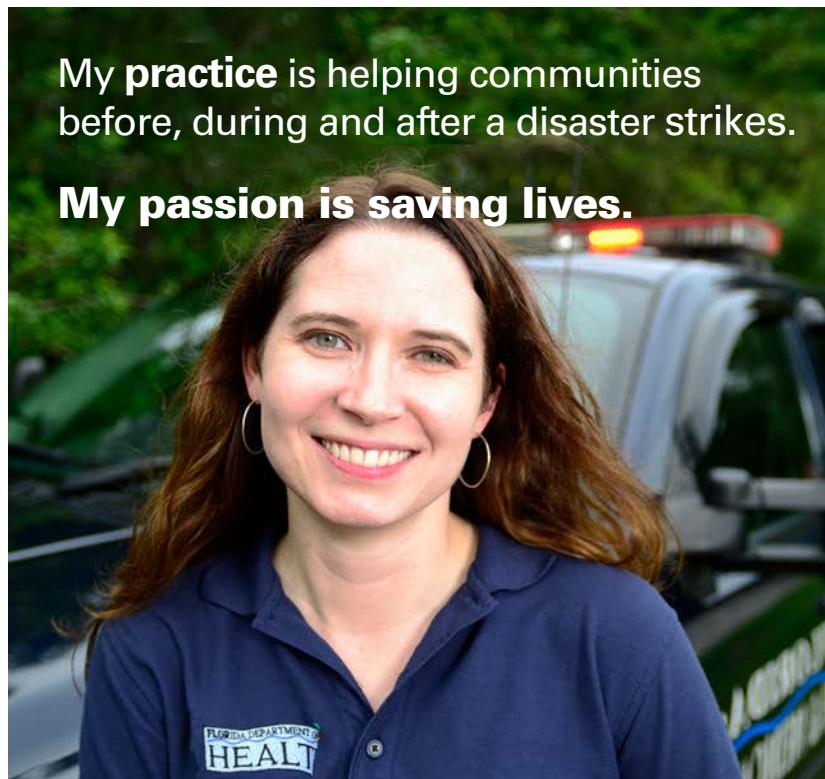
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National Veterinary Response Team Supports COVID-19 Vaccine Missions

by CDR Wanda Wilson Egbe, DVM, MPH, Dipl. ACVPM

In April, in support of Wisconsin's request, the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) under the Assistant Secretary of Preparedness and Response (ASPR), deployed the National Veterinary Response Team (NVRT) and Disaster Medical Assistance Team (DMAT) to provide COVID-19 vaccinators and support staff to augment state and local medical response resources at the Alliant Energy Center community vaccination site. The NVRT and the DMAT teams are Emergency Support Function 8 resources. The NVRT provides veterinary and public health support and the DMAT provides human health and public health support in a disaster area, emergency event, public health emergency or National Special Security Event. For this mission, a 14-member vaccine team was created consisting of two veterinary team commanders, one safety officer, seven veterinarians, a pediatric nurse, a physician's assistant, and a pharmacist. An incident management team Group Supervisor was also deployed to oversee mission activities and ensure that the deployment team met their mission essential functions. During this mission, the team administered more than 3,500 vaccines and assisted the Alliant Energy Center with preparing vaccine doses, patient intake and monitoring after the vaccine was administered. NVRT Director Dr. Wanda Wilson Egbe and National Commander Dr. Robin Brennen supervised this multi-specialty team of health care responders.

A second NDMS multi-specialty mission, led by the NVRT, was conducted in early May at the Laurel County Extension Office in rural London, Kentucky. In addition to the NVRT members, this team included members from DMAT and the Disaster Mortuary Assistance Team. This 12-member vaccine team consisted of a team commander, a safety officer, four veterinary officers, a nurse practitioner, a registered nurse, two forensic dentists, a dental officer and a pharmacist. This team administered more than 400 vaccines, prepared vaccine doses and completed essential administrative duties. The Team Commander Mr. Walter Kaplan said, "I was impressed with the dedication and professionalism of our specialty team. I believe we made a positive impact in this small community."

Since early 2020, ASPR has deployed thousands of medical, logistical and command and control personnel from NDMS to help states, territories and jurisdictions respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Early in 2021, to expand the pool of qualified professionals who were able to administer the COVID-19 vaccine and in accordance with the precepts laid out by the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act, federal veterinarians and other health providers were given the authority and liability immunity to administer the COVID-19 vaccine. This unprecedented step allowed providers across ASPR and the country to support the President's mandate to protect Americans and curb the effects of COVID-19. CDR Wanda Wilson Egbe said, "I am proud of the work that the team and ASPR does every day but somehow this



Photo 1: The National Veterinary Response Team helps someone in Wisconsin to receive a COVID-19 vaccine.



Photo 2: Members of the National Veterinary Response Team prepare COVID-19 vaccines.

deployment stands out. The integration of the specialty teams to accomplish the mission of the Agency and to support the American people stands as model of success. Overall, it was a humbling experience."

OBITUARY

Captain Charlotte D. Spires, DVM, MPH, DACVPM, USPHS (ret.)

Retired Captain Charlotte Anita Dortch Spires, a longtime COA member, passed away on May 24, 2021, from breast cancer at the age of 62. She was born in Farmville, Virginia, to parents Charles William and Pinkie Goode Dortch, along with her twin brother Charles Dortch, Jr. She was raised in South Hill and Mecklenburg County, VA. From her early childhood, Captain Spires only wanted to be a veterinarian. She graduated from Parkview High School in South Hill, VA, and enrolled at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, where she earned both a Bachelor of Science in Animal Science and a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine in 1982.

Dr. Spires excelled in her career at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Department of Health and Human Services. She received her commission into the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) in 1995, rising to the rank of Captain (O-6). She earned a Master of Public Health degree in epidemiology from The Johns Hopkins University in 1998 and was a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Preventive Medicine. As a USPHS commissioned officer, she was part of a team of veterinarians who were deployed for animal rescue operations in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which was the largest animal rescue effort in the world, as well as deployments for Hurricanes Rita, Ike, and Harvey. Based on her expertise in animal rescue, CAPT

Spires developed federal guidance for the management of companion animals of hurricane evacuees. For that effort, she received the USPHS Commendation Medal and was also chosen as the 2009 USPHS Veterinary Responder of the Year. She also received the James H. Steele One Health Outstanding Public Health Service Veterinary Career Award in

2017. Throughout her career, CAPT Spires received numerous awards, including two Crisis Response Service Awards for her hurricane relief work, a Presidential Unit Citation for her role in Ebola response, and an Army Achievement Medal.

At her retirement in 2018, CAPT Spires was the Chief Veterinarian for the National Veterinary Response Team. Previously, she was the Executive Director of the National Biodefense Science Board, a past president of the DC chapter of the Commissioned Officer Association, Director of the Commissioned Officers Association Board of Directors, and Vice President of the DELMARVA-DC Tuskegee Veterinary Medical Alumni Association. She also practiced relief veterinary medicine in several clinics and hospitals throughout Maryland and Virginia, including military veterinary clinics. She served as an adjunct faculty member at the Center for Public and Corporate Veterinary Medicine at the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, where she lectured to students on veterinary and public health preparedness and response.

She leaves behind her husband of 37 years Darrell, her loving children Jessica and Nelson, her twin brother Judge Charles Dortch, Jr. (Doris), and many other loving relatives and friends.

The CAPT (ret.) Charlotte Dortch Spires, DVM, MPH, DACVPM Endowed Scholarship has been established at Tuskegee University to support veterinary medical students in the College of Veterinary Medicine pursuing non-clinical veterinary careers, and the family requests donations to this scholarship in lieu of flowers. Donations can be made at <http://www.tuskegee.edu/give>.



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We Welcome New Members of COA, May 1-June 30, 2021

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LT Bryan Galvez

CAPT Nona Gladbach
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	CAPT Will Nash	

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