

## A Conversation with a Public Health Innovator

### 55th USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium, Glendale, Arizona



Dr. Leana Wen gives the keynote address before the COA annual meeting.

by LCDR Renee Cannon, LCSW, BCD, CCHP

On May 24, 2022, I had the distinguished pleasure of being the Aide de- Camp for Dr. Leana Wen, the keynote speaker for 55th Annual Scientific and Training Symposium. Dr. Wen often describes the invisibility of public health with this phrase, "Public health saved your life today – you just don't know it." As a narrator, she compels others to listen and engage in the public health conversation by first acknowledging her unique human experience. She is the former Commissioner of the Baltimore City Health Department, Professor of Health Policy and Management at George Washington University, and author

of "Lifelines, A Doctor's Journey in the Fight for Public Health."

As a first-generation college graduate and public health professional, I sought to know more about what motivated Dr. Wen to write the book. I wanted to know how she saw the impact of her work in public health and what motivated her to write a book. She graciously informed me that the book was written as a call to action to engage others in an open dialogue on the state of public health. Furthermore, to illuminate how the COVID-19 pandemic, like its pathogenic predecessors, widened health disparities within our nation and

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## Annual Awards

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from the Executive Director



Jacqueline Rychnovsky,  
PhD, FAANP, CAE  
Captain (Ret.), Nurse Corps, US Navy

After a 2-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 55th USPHS Scientific & Training Symposium was held May 23-26, 2022, at the Renaissance Hotel and Convention Center in Glendale, Arizona. Consistent with the theme of "Public Health: Preparing for the Future," the event kicked off with pre-conference sessions which included naloxone overdose reversal training, developing culturally relevant partnerships, Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS) and Basic Life Support (BLS), diabetes care certificate training, a USPHS Retirement Seminar, Interagency leadership training, inter-category deployment readiness training, racism in medicine, and LGBTQ cultural competence in the workplace offerings. That evening, hundreds of officers donned their finest formal uniform and gathered for the annual Anchor & Caduceus dinner, where the ceremonial cake cutting was performed by the most junior and senior officers present, Lieutenant Junior Grade Pamela Myers, and Admiral Rachel Levine, our Assistant Secretary for Health (ASH). The guest

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# COA Member Benefits

## Capitol Hill Representation

Efforts on Capitol Hill continually support all Commissioned Corps officers – active, former, reserve, 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 of COA and the USPHS Commissioned Corps

## 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, and MHA

## NYMC Online MPH

50 percent discount for the online MPH and certificate programs

## Scholarship Programs

College scholarships for children, grandchildren, and spouses of COA members and high school seniors

## The Ohio State University

In-state tuition for graduate nursing and certification programs



## Legislative Update Embrace the Suck

CAPT (Ret) Alan Echt, Outgoing Chair, Legislative Affairs Committee

It has been an honor to serve for the last year as the Chair of the Legislative Affairs Committee. This will be my last column for Frontline as Chair. A year ago, what seemed to me to be fairly simple goals, now seem to be very difficult to achieve. Some of our efforts have been met with some unexpected roadblocks and opposition. In meetings with Congressional staffers, I've been told that amending the Military Lending Act to include us would be a "heavy lift" and that expanding the National Park Service's military park pass program to include the Commissioned Corps would be too expensive, considering the Park Service's maintenance backlog. I take some comfort in the fact that we managed to get language into S.3799, the PREVENT Pandemics Act, to permanently extend the 60-day leave carryover limit to 120 days, even though that bill has not passed the Senate. I have learned to take the long view.

In 1982, the ASH, Dr. Edward Brandt, testified before a House Committee, "Our long-range plans for the Corps are to focus on several areas of critical need which are not adequately serviced by other groups. These include the Indian Health Service... We plan to limit the length of service of Corps members who do not evidence a long-term interest in our programs, are not willing to be as mobile as our needs demand, or who do not show the kind of professional growth required for a career in the Public Health Service...we are now looking for people who can work independently; are willing to work

and live in remote sites; are able to relocate to places most in need of their services..." Sound familiar? According to the testimony, active Corps strength at the time was just over 6,000 officers on active duty. There are questions and answers in the testimony about Office of Management and Budget (OMB) contentions that a Civil Service public health workforce would be cheaper than a force of commissioned officers. Forty years on, it seems like nothing has changed.

I would argue that that's not necessarily bad news. Forty years later, the Commissioned Corps is still here, and the active-duty strength is still around 6,000 officers. The Corps continues to challenge OMB's assumptions. To further quote from the ASH's 1982 testimony, "...the history of the Public Health Service is replete with instances of the Corps rising to the challenge to meet the ever-changing needs of the Nation. We fully expect the Corps to continue to evolve and to meet the challenges of the coming century as ably as it has met the challenges of the past century." Understand that your Legislative Affairs Committee will keep working on so-called "heavy lifts," arguing that the cost of adding the Corps to the Park Pass program amounts to "decimal dust," and pushing for your parity with the other uniformed services to the best of the Committee's ability. Every now and then, we'll be able to notch up some notable victories like GI Bill transferability, whistleblower protection, DD 214s, and hopefully, a permanent change in 42 U.S. Code § 210-1, the law governing Corps annual and sick leave. In the meantime, do what I did and embrace the suck.

# Students Selected for 2022 RADM Mishoe Scholarship Awards

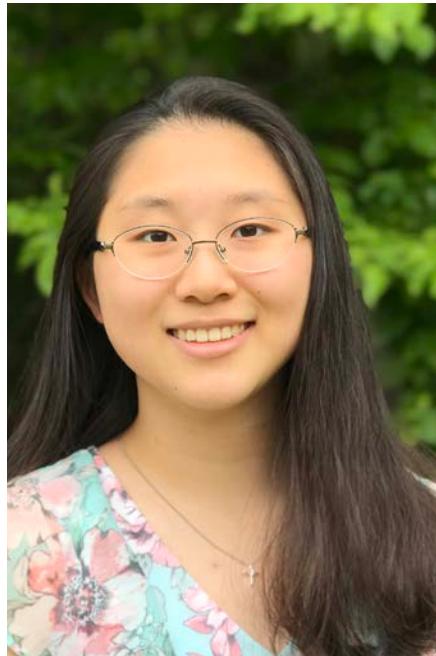
by Lynn Abrahamson

The PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF) is pleased to announce the 2022 recipients of the RADM Helena O. Mishoe "Believe" Scholarship – Yerahm Hong and Landon Lee.

The scholarship program was established by RADM Helena Mishoe, PhD, MPH to foster the career dreams of high school seniors from underrepresented populations who are interested in the health sciences and research, or health-related disciplines. Candidates for the scholarship are assessed on strength of character, a commitment to community service, resiliency in overcoming challenges, and leadership potential.

**Yerahm Hong is the first-place award recipient.** She will be attending the University of Pennsylvania in the fall of 2022 to pursue biomedical science on the pre-med track. In her scholarship essay, Yerahm wrote that she has a "goose mom" – a family where a young person migrates to a foreign country and the parent supports the student's education by working abroad. Seasonal visits are made the way geese migrate every year – hence the term. Although she misses her mother, Yerahm has used her absence as an opportunity to become more determined, independent, and adaptable.

Her letters of recommendation highlight the fact that she is an exceptional student who is extremely well rounded and has a "heart to serve others." For instance, she envisioned and organized the first ever String Ensemble at her high school. She then sought performance venues for the group including at a nursing home, a local Rotary Club, and school events. As a



Yerahm Hong

member of the Beta Club, she is involved in several community service activities. Yerahm is also active in content related clubs such as Science Olympiad, the Math Team, and the Academic Team. As the Chair of the Math Department at her high school writes, "Yerahm has already proven that she has success in her bones and a kind spirit to move mountains."

**Landon Lee received the second highest score** from scholarship reviewers. In the fall of 2022, he will begin at William Jewell College with a major in biology with the intention of becoming a physician. The college is known for teaching critical thinking with a goal of training and empowering students to make a difference in the world.

Landon is an excellent student with strong leadership skills who has served the community in a variety of ways. In addition



Landon Lee

to packing backpacks for the local food bank, he has distributed food with "Food on the Move" – a program that provides healthy and quality food to economically challenged and hard-to-reach communities. In his essay, Landon writes that his view of the world has "expanded through service." At age eight, he used his birthday money to donate to the Congo. This led him to later go on mission trips to places such as Haiti where his interest in helping others was reinforced. In addition to playing high school baseball and football, Landon is a member of the Premed club and the American Indian Education Program at his high school as well as the Young Men's Service League of Tulsa.

To learn more about the Mishoe Scholarship fund, please visit: <https://www.phscof.org/scholarships/mishoe-believe-scholarship/>



## The US Health Defense Force

by RADM (Ret.) Steve Solomon, MD,  
Immediate Past President, Commissioned  
Officer's Foundation for the Advancement  
of Public Health

In previous columns, I have proposed that the Commissioned Corps of the USPHS, as a military service, should be the foundation of a restructured and redesigned public health system in the United States. To achieve that goal, we will need to articulate with the utmost clarity our understanding that health defense--the protection of the United States from illness and disease--is as essential a part of national security as are threats from foreign armed forces.

Health defense requires real-time data about the nature and size of a threat. The inadequacy of public health surveillance has been written about for decades and is due to underfunding, jurisdictional disputes, lack of coordination between and among agencies, and a lack of interoperability of data collection and analysis. The consequences of not having real-time data have been glaringly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. The uniformed PHS, deployed across jurisdictions and agencies can facilitate data-sharing for health.

Health defense requires the strengthening of protections for those most threatened by illness, people for whom we have done the least to safeguard from disease threats. Addressing the social

determinants of health and ensuring the availability of prevention services and clinical care to disadvantaged communities are critical tasks if we are to ensure national health security. The PHS Commissioned Corps, with experience serving the underserved, can focus on concrete objectives to achieve health equity.

Health defense requires the ability to call upon teams of highly trained professionals with specific skills to respond rapidly to emergencies, whether emerging infections, natural disasters, or environmental hazards. Those teams need ongoing training and education to expand and refine their skills. The ability to conduct group training and make skill-building education available to PHS officers is currently constrained not just by limited funding but also by objections from the agencies that pay most officers' salaries.

Health defense requires the capacity to deploy units around the world for disease detection and to assist under-resourced countries to control emerging infectious diseases before they reach the United States. The PHS Commissioned Corps has the institutional memory of engagement with every type of health threat, both domestically and internationally.

Health defense requires the full integration of an overall strategy, the application of

logistics to move personnel and supplies, and the flexible use of specialized tactics specific to populations, geographies, and circumstances. A crucial element in overcoming health threats is a communication strategy, operationalized through numerous different channels, tactically adjusted to account for cultural sensitivity, language, and regional and demographic variation. The PHS Commissioned Corps is the only health entity with the military structure necessary to link strategy, operations, and tactics.

Most importantly, health defense requires people, those professionals with the education, training, and experience to recognize threats at the earliest stage, to deploy immediately in emergencies, to carry on the fight against chronic, persistent health problems, and to serve whenever and wherever the need is greatest. Those people need to work within a military chain of command that allows leaders to train those forces, maintain their operational readiness, support their morale and well-being, and deploy them as those leaders deem necessary.

Thus, the United States needs a Health Defense Force, a military organization with servicemembers dedicated to the protection of the health, supporting global disease prevention as part of that mission. We need a Health Defense Force with

see **PRESIDENT** continued on page 15

# American Samoa Deployment

## Disclaimer

The findings and conclusions of the article are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect those of the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

by LT Jamla Rizek, Nurse; LCDR Lauren Ryszka, Nurse; LCDR James Ireland, Pharm.D.

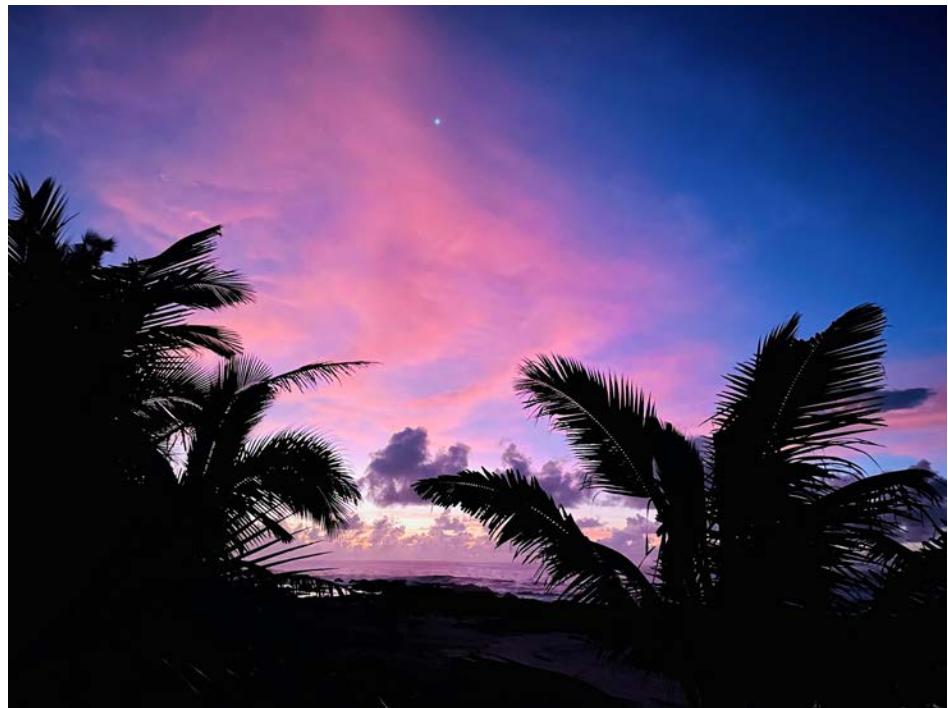
American Samoa (AS) is a territory of the United States located in the South Pacific. The population is 49,710 according to the 2020 census. While the mainland was suffering with the COVID pandemic, strict quarantine orders by the Department of Health (DOH) were placed intentionally to protect the people on the island. After the first positive COVID case in early 2022, and with the subsequent spread, the goal was to decrease the flow of COVID + patients presenting to the only hospital on the island, increase the number of treatments and vaccinations, and prevent deaths.

## Hesitancy

Islanders that were hesitant to get the vaccine and/or the booster were comforted knowing that all the officers were vaccinated and received their booster prior to arrival. This led to an increase in clinical staff getting their booster who subsequently encouraged their family and village members to get vaccinated.

The nurses on the island expressed concerns over inserting IVs and providing immunizations at such a high volume. They were able to watch, learn, and practice with support from clinically competent PHS Nurses because, as we know, learning without application does not lead to retention.

Hesitancy from the providers was two-fold. They verbalized having limited to no experience caring for COVID positive patients let alone familiarity with the treatment options. The clinical expertise of Pharmacy Officers with first-hand



Sunrise photo of American Samoa courtesy of LT Jamla Rizek.

experience led to the best decisions on course of treatment.

The people of AS are resilient. Their resolve and commitment resulted in complete avoidance of the flu pandemic in 1918. That same level of commitment allowed AS to remain COVID free until early 2022. This allowed the majority of residents to be fully vaccinated and to have multiple treatment options that weren't available earlier in the pandemic.

## Overall Impact/highlights

By working collaboratively with DOH staff, officers were able to dispel fears regarding monoclonal antibody treatments, combat vaccine hesitancy, and earn the trust and respect of the people of AS.

In total, 47 PHS Officers supported the territory of American Samoa. They included nurses, pharmacists, veterinarians, social workers, and environmental health officers from the FDA, CCHQ, NIH, HRSA, CMS and CDC.

60-day cumulative data includes the following: 11,453 vaccines administered and 1,606 COVID therapeutic treatments administered. These vaccinations and COVID treatments likely prevented countless hospitalizations and deaths. 21 vaccine sites were operationalized and supported by PHS Officers more than doubling the population boosted from 30% to 63.5%. In addition, officers increased the number of treatments provided, from 16 per day to over 100 treatments per day.

In addition, officers were able to fit test over 47 clinicians, provide BLS certification for 87 Nurses and Department of Health affiliates, educate on proper donning and doffing techniques and provide (1:1) IV insertion instruction. The gratitude expressed by the Samoan people was constant, humbling, and the officers were impacted by the "Samoan Way," of life, respect, and hospitality.

For more posts on this mission follow: @usphscc and @ASPRgov on Twitter.



# Board of Directors

## Getting What You Need

by CDR Kelly Valente, Pharm.D., USPHS

I write this on June 15th, two weeks until the beginning of the new COA year and the end of my time as your Board Chair. It is an odd feeling and I say to myself, "what are you going to do now?" Well, the promotion announcements came and went and I, like 90% of the officers eligible for O6, was not selected. So, I have plenty to do in that arena. However, as I have said in multiple of my Frontline posts, we are more than officers seeking promotions: we are parents; we are caregivers; we are people who strive to make the world a better place, somehow and someway. Is it "high impact, high outcome work" all the time? No, it is not. However, there are other parts of our lives where we can feel like we won. During the shutdown portion of the pandemic, I started marathon training. I did it at first

because I am one of those officers who has struggled with their weight, never seeming to be under the cut off for my height. But then, it turned into something different. All of a sudden, I felt I had an obtainable goal. Since June of 2020, I have run 14 half marathons and I hope this is the year I can get to 26.2. I am super-fast? No. I am beating my time with every race? Yes. I am under the upper limit of the weight requirement? Yes.

So, I may not be promoted, but I have won in many different ways that have nothing to do with benchmarks or score sheets. As an association, I feel we also had many small wins during my time as chair. This year we saw an increase in communication about how leadership needs to balance out the bell curve of ranks. With CCHQ Connects and our symposium time with leadership, we got

honest, candid answers to our questions and about retirement for new active duty and Ready Reserve COA members. We had outreach events for new members and our Ready Reserve members. We had multiple gatherings for current and former senior leaders to speak to us and provide words of wisdom. As I leave the board chair position, I am optimistic; I feel that the Commissioned Corps is going to be alright. We have demonstrated our dedication and our worth.

So, as I leave and move on to other interests in my life, I inspire you to look within yourself for the small wins and the obtainable goals. Mick Jagger has told us "you can't always get what you want, but if you try sometime, you may just find, what you need." Go find what you need. Onward...

## A New Beginning at the End of a Long Career

by Dave Corrigan, Deputy Director COA

At the 55th Annual PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF) symposium, Prudential presented "New Beginnings: Transitioning Successfully into Retirement." Jeff Felton, an Air Force Veteran and Prudential Pathways speaker, facilitated the session. The session is part of Prudential's Financial Wellness program, which offers financial education, one-on-one support and digital tools to help individuals address a multitude of financial needs and pain points.

"Transitioning Successfully into Retirement," presented by Jeff on May 23, covered financial wellness tips and tricks to consider when planning for retirement. Jeff discussed items such as managing cash flow, understanding which benefits will remain with you after retirement, how to protect savings, and the importance of estate planning. A past attendee of the seminar shared that it was an "overview of pertinent concepts in finances for retirement strategies. Even though it was my first time attending a retirement session, I was able to follow, and learned a lot."

Prudential also hosted an exhibit booth at the conference and provided attendees the opportunity to schedule an appointment with a financial professional for a personalized financial analysis.

Financial wellness is personal and means something different to each person. However, at Prudential, they believe that financial wellness is best achieved when individuals adopt the behaviors that result in:

- Managing their day-to-day finances.
- Achieving important short and long-term financial goals.
- Protecting themselves against key financial risks.

This philosophy was apparent in Prudential's presence and offerings during the 55th Annual COF Symposium. We are appreciative of the educational support that Prudential was able to provide the Officers of the Commissioned Corps.

If you didn't have time to attend the session, or stop by the Prudential exhibit booth, you still have time to register for a complimentary, personalized financial analysis using [this link](#).

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see **CAREER** continued on page 24

# Deployment Preparedness: Insights Before Boots Hit the Ground

by LT Lee Ryder, PT, DPT

In a recent panel discussion amongst five Therapist Category officers, one message was undeniably clear: prioritizing mental health is central to deployment success. Receiving the call to deploy is often accompanied by a flood of emotions ranging from exhilaration and excitement, to feeling overwhelmed and anxious. Officers agree that in order to promote successful deployment experiences, it is imperative to practice foundational preparedness strategies that encourage physical and psychological wellbeing to maintain optimal readiness for service.

On April 22, 2022, the Therapist Category Readiness and Deployment Committee hosted a panel discussion for officers to share insights into deployment preparedness. Officers featured on the panel included CDR Johanna Gilstrap, CDR Steven Spoonemore, CDR Anne Whitis, LCDR Amber Beardslee, and LT Lee Ryder. Therapist officers who specialize in human movement sciences widely recognize the notion that maintaining physical wellbeing is paramount for successful performance. However, these officers also called attention to a realm of health that is often less prioritized and more stigmatized than physical health: mental and emotional wellness. All officers agreed that maintaining physical health during deployment stems from a foundation of nurturing one's mental health. It is impossible to separate physical wellbeing from mental health, as the two are inextricably linked on a neurophysiological level and commonly have a symbiotic relationship, with both simultaneously declining or improving in tandem with each other.

Stressful experiences induce a heightened sympathetic nervous system response, amplifying the "fight-or-flight" reaction which evolved from surviving life-threatening circumstances. Physiologically, this results in increased heart rate, breathing rate, and muscle tension. This primitive fight-or-flight response occurs in response to either real or perceived threat. Therefore, during periods of high stress, the body can misinterpret symptoms of physiologic arousal as impending danger. This nervous system response forms the basis for understanding anxiety, and is helpful to recognize when one experiences heightened emotions during deployment preparation and embarkation.

It is almost inevitable that deployment will involve moments of increased stress. Officers on the panel recommended several strategies to help counteract the heightened neurologic stress response, including practicing meditation, yoga, and journaling. One officer suggested keeping a small notebook in the deployment go-bag for easy accessibility during any deployment.

Sensory grounding and diaphragmatic breathing practices were other recommended strategies to encourage positive habits for maintaining mental health. Additionally, the importance of daily physical activity was unanimously noted to be paramount for maintaining health while on deployment. Officers suggested packing a TRX suspension training system or performing body weight high-intensity interval training routines to encourage reaching a target heart rate, which can be beneficial for reducing symptoms of anxiety.

Officers also discussed other strategies to improve deployment preparedness, including utilizing the deployment packing list developed by the TPAC Preparedness Subcommittee, which helps ensure officers are well-equipped for any deployment scenario. Several officers mentioned packing items such as books and downloadable podcasts to engage in during down time. This is especially helpful with the "hurry up and wait" dynamic that is common during deployment and may result in amplified anxiety for officers who have difficulty remaining calm in periods of uncertainty. Other themes discussed by the panel included preparing for deployment on a personal level, with family, and at one's duty station. Personal considerations included creating a plan for care of dependents, pets, and plants, as well as initiating auto-pay for any bills that may arise (including ones with unusual timing, such as car insurance). It may be helpful to outline communication expectations with family while the officer is deployed, as the work shift hours could be atypical (e.g. overnight), making it challenging to schedule regular windows for communication. Panelists relayed the importance of outlining clear guidelines for carryover of work duties while the officer is away, including clinic coverage and other administrative duties such as committee meetings, projects, and presentations. A central concept that the panelists encouraged is for officers to remain flexible at all times, knowing deployment situations are likely to change on a frequent basis.

Serving on deployment encompasses only one step in the entire process of maintaining readiness and upholding standards of excellence as a Commissioned Officer. The foundation of deployment success lies in undertaking fundamental preparedness strategies and having holistic mechanisms in place to support one's well-being. As the nation's leaders in public health, it is imperative that we make consistent and concentrated efforts to prioritize our mental and physical health in order to remain optimally prepared for deployment and service in public health.

# USPHS Enhances Therapy Practice

by LTJG Michael Blair, MSPT, CSCS, CMTPT, PPSC; LT Joseph Douglass, PT, DPT, CSCS; LT Robert Mitchell Todd PT, DPT, MS, ATC

The Col Douglass A. Kersey Advanced Clinical & Operational Practice Course is an intensive 5-day course on advanced clinical practice in neuromusculoskeletal physical therapy for physical therapists (PT's) serving the military community. It offers innovative, evidence-based training to help enrich clinical practices, challenge decision-making, and increase the already expanding role of PT's in the unique mission of the military. The course is named after COL Douglas Kersey, who was a pioneer in Army Physical Therapy. His passion for preventative health and dedication to advancing the professional role of the Army PT inspired this multi-faceted training. Each year, PT's leave Kersey better equipped to serve as physician extenders and wellness consultants as respected members of the health care team.

LT Jeremy Dautrich, LT Joseph Douglass, LT Mitchell Todd, and LTJG Michael Blair attended this year's course. LTs Dautrich and Douglass are stationed with the Bureau of Prisons (BOP), LT Todd is stationed with Indian Health Services (IHS), and LTJG Michael Blair is in the Ready Reserves and is a civilian provider at Naval Health Clinic Quantico. They are all working toward Board Certification in Orthopedics with the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties (ABPTS) and felt that this course was integral in achieving that goal.

The coursework consisted of advanced radiology training, primary care differential diagnosis, running analysis and treatment, manual therapy, and clinical reasoning scenarios. It also had instruction in concussion management and nutritional consideration. All of these advanced trainings are critical for military and U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) providers, due to the extended privileges they have in clinical practice. The ability to manage musculoskeletal conditions early as part of a primary care team has a direct impact on readiness. "Musculoskeletal injury is the leading reason soldiers are medically not-ready for combat deployment and the leading cause of disability in military service members," according to Teyhan Et Al in *Clinical Orthopedics and Related Research*, 2015. By sending therapists to training of this level, USPHS shows that it is invested in making sure its officers receive higher level education, promoting their value on deployments and for the agencies that they serve.

The course also provides a great opportunity for networking. The ability to interact with other USPHS officers provided each with an opportunity to educate about their respective agencies. The inclusion of the Ready Reserves enabled active-duty members to learn more about one of the newest components of the Commissioned Corps. The representation of BOP and Indian Health Service (IHS) providers allowed for discussion on the varied roles and opportunities within the Department of Health and Human Services HHS and USPHS. Most notable, was the ability



Physical Therapists gather for group shot after a manual therapy training session.

to engage in active discussion with Army, Air Force, and Navy officers about the USPHS mission. Most are not aware of what our branch does or where we tend to serve. They are genuinely excited to learn about the Public Health Service. This serves as a great recruitment opportunity to help grow the Commissioned Corps with junior officers eager to support its agencies.

All four physical therapists left the course feeling challenged and motivated. They were grateful for the opportunity to advance their skills, promote the Commissioned Corps, and interact with officers across the different branches. Force Protection and deployability are key to the success of the mission of the USPHS. Physical therapists offer the skills necessary to properly diagnose and treat the musculoskeletal conditions that limit medical readiness. The training provided by courses like the Col Kersey Course ensure that Commissioned Corps officers are mission-ready, deployable, and assets to the other categories in maintaining readiness before, during, and after deployments.

# Expanding Recognition of Student Pharmacists Advancing Public Health

by CDR Trang Tran, CDR Sadhna Khatri, 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 toward voluntary health-related services, emerging public health issues, or contributions that advance the goals of Healthy People 2030 or the National Prevention Strategy.

Despite unprecedented challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic, the team has been tirelessly at work behind the scenes supporting

and promoting the public health accomplishments of exceptional pharmacy students. This team consists of 8 members who have made this year's program a remarkable success: CDR Sadhna Khatri, CDR Trang Tran, CDR Chaltu Wakijra, LCDR Daniil Marchuk, LCDR Sally Doan, LCDR Marcia Fields, LT Colleen Kim, and LT Sylvia Park.

In 2022, this Program recognized 90 pharmacy students from across the country as the recipients of this distinguished award. Of those, the program selected the top ten award recipients for their public health achievements that positively impacted their local communities and beyond. These top ten award recipients were recognized by RADM Ty Bingham at the APhA Annual Meeting on March 18, 2022. In addition, these recipients are currently featured on the PharmPAC Student Awards Website.

Congratulations to all 2022 USPHS Excellence in Public Health Pharmacy Award recipients. Special thanks to all members of the PharmPAC Student Awards Program for their leadership, hard work, dedication, and flexibility during this challenging time.



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# Member Spotlight

## CDR Mark Miller, Ph.D., M.S., M.B.A.

by CDR Suzanne Redmon, RDH, BSDH,  
MSHI

As PHS Officers, we know leadership is important for personal and career growth but, most importantly, it enables us to do our best when serving across the nation and throughout the world. CDR Mark Miller is an impeccable example of leadership - from his extensive educational background to his remarkable career advancement. Sharing officer success stories is a great way to spark motivation and confidence for officers to aim for the stars.

Commissioned in 2009, CDR Miller shared what motivated him to join the Commissioned Corps. "While completing my PhD dissertation, I attended a career seminar with a CDC-PHS RADM as the keynote speaker. I always valued service to America, particularly uniformed services, and previously worked at the US Army Center for Environmental Health Research. This was my first introduction to USPHS and was sold immediately. After graduation, upon my first federal job offer from the US EPA, I accepted, contingent on support of becoming a commissioned PHS Officer. I have since served in five programs, two agencies, and in two geographic locations over the past twelve and a half years."

CDR Miller is currently the Director of Research Management for the Division of the National Toxicology Program (DNTP) at The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), and formerly the Chief of Staff of NIEHS. He earned a bachelor's degree in Biology from the University of Virginia, a Masters in Environmental Toxicology from Oklahoma State University, a Masters in Molecular, Cellular, Developmental Biology from the University of Michigan, and a Master of Business Administration from Kenan Flagler Business School at the University of North Carolina. He graduated from the Federal Executive Institute, Leadership for a Democratic Society program,

established in 1968 to provide the highest-level leadership training in the federal government. To top it off, CDR Miller earned a PhD from the School of Public Health at the University of Michigan.

CDR Miller described his role and path to leadership at NIEHS. While serving at the US EPA, he transitioned away from primary science, conducting toxicological assessments for toxics release inventory, to Science Administration. CDR Miller says, "robust science provides underpinnings for sound decision making." In 2013, CDR Miller became the Chief of Staff at NIEHS, the world premier biomedical and scientific research organization investigating how environmental exposures contribute to human wellness or disease. He recalled how, "it took some time to fully understand the position purpose. On the surface it's putting out daily fires that rose to the level of the Office of the Director, while supporting the Director's vision. More profoundly, it was listening and building relationships across the Institute to provide a foundation of support, to promote healthier lives." By 2019, he applied for a detail as the Scientific Special Assistant to the Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services. CDR Miller stated, "in doing so, I hoped to get a better understanding of the HHS operational approach, help directly translate, and incorporate integrated data streams into the prioritization and decision-making processes." Upon returning to NIEHS following his detail, he was able to pivot his career to become the Director of Research Management, operationalizing and implementing the scientific research portfolio of the intramural DNTP.

CDR Miller described serving in a leadership position with NIEHS and on deployment as "humbling". He divulged how early-on he was intimidated by the abundance of talented and skilled professionals throughout the government and PHS, particularly, officers he served



CDR Mark Miller, Ph.D., M.S., M.B.A.

with on deployment. CDR Miller recounted how he used to think being a respected leader meant he needed to be the expert in the room. Over time he learned bringing people together and unifying individual skills to work as a team is worth more than being the most knowledgeable person. He stressed how achievements are enhanced with teams and learned that by focusing on supporting others, removing hurdles, and developing relationships, he can have a tremendous impact as a leader for a unified mission. He always takes a pause while leading to look around in admiration of the dedicated professionals around him.

CDR Miller shared the importance of COA to him, "COA is a tremendous organization solely focused on supporting the needs of PHS Officers, families, and our mission. COA serves the PHS as a leading proponent for positive change and better positioning the PHS to meet public health challenges."

As parting thoughts for other officers CDR Mark Miller emphasizes, "Don't be afraid to take chances!"



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# Member Spotlight

## LCDR Chaolong Qi, PhD, PE

by LCDR Suzanne Redmon, RDH, BSDH, MSHI

LCDR Chaolong Qi was awarded the 2021 Arthur Flemming Award and the 2022 PHS Engineer of the Year (EOY) Award. The Arthur S. Flemming Award, established 1948, celebrates 70 years of outstanding people in the federal government. Recognized by the president of the United States, agency heads, and private sector, winners are selected from all federal service areas. Notable past recipients include Neil Armstrong, Robert Gates, and Dr. Anthony Fauci. The PHS EOY Award recognizes an engineer or architect of the Commissioned Corps or Civil Service who demonstrated outstanding leadership, innovation, dedication, and service to their federal agency and strives for self-improvement and to improve abilities of team members. It represents service-over-self and going above and beyond to accomplish the mission to the Engineer Professional Advisory Committee, PHS, and agency served.

He has been awarded two awards for his engineering accomplishments. First, a US-patented handheld instrument he designed for the NASA space program allowed astronauts to instantaneously measure space dust won him the NASA Space Act Award. Second, he received the 2009 Research & Development (R&D magazine) World 100 Award, which recognizes the 100 most innovative inventions annually worldwide. He joined the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and designed another US-patented instrument instantaneously measuring workers' exposure to airborne particles down to nanometer ranges. His engineering research at NIOSH led him to developing engineering control solutions to protect respiratory health of millions of workers and consumers from exposures to hazardous airborne contaminants. On scientific merits, his research outcomes

led to inclusions in national standards and emphasis programs by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Consumer Product Safety Commission. His recent research was covered by National Public Radio in 2019 and Stone Magazine in 2020 and provided engineering control solutions, which protected stone countertop workers experiencing a global outbreak of silicosis (deadly lung disease from overexposures to silica dust). LCDR Qi didn't think about being nominated but his leadership team recognized his accomplishments and gave him encouragement and their full support for the nominations. He felt surprised and joyous to be nominated and receive both awards as he knew there were many deserving nominees. He is proud of his achievement, work recognition in NIOSH, CDC, and PHS, and is thrilled to bring visibility to the Corps with the Arthur Flemming Award. He expressed how the awards enhance his service, and although these are individual awards, they reflect teamwork and contributions of public health professionals.

LCDR Qi has been a Commissioned Corps officer for four and half years. He obtained his PhD in Chemical Environmental Engineering from Washington University in St. Louis studying aerosol instrumentation measuring particles to nanometer range. His post-doctoral training was Mechanical Engineering at the University of Minnesota. His parents are both mechanical engineers, which guided his career path. LCDR Qi said, "it creates satisfaction when solutions lead to instant results and a healthier and safer environment." As a child, he dreamed of wearing a uniform and joining a uniformed service, but inspiration to join the Commissioned Corps came from working as a civilian with PHS officers at the CDC, observing their agency work and work with Ebola response. He deployed in



LCDR Chaolong Qi, PhD, PE

a leadership role five times since 2020 for COVID-19, and missions to protect unaccompanied children and Afghan evacuees. His engineering expertise in developing high-profile guidance and response tools had broad applications in emergency responses by the CDC and other agencies. LCDR Qi gets satisfaction from his field work, which often provides ventilation assessments and consultation to improve indoor air quality at facilities housing vulnerable populations.

LCDR Qi is the current Chair-Elect of the Asian Pacific American Officers Committee (APAOC) providing advice and recommendations to the Surgeon General on minority health and disparity. LCDR Qi stated he appreciates how COA represents all the PHS officers' common interests and brings us together. He is a proud member of the COA and takes every opportunity to advocate the values that COA affords to officers.

In his final thought, LCDR Qi stated the recent changes in the Corps can cause anxious and frustrated feelings but reflecting on the core values help us fulfill the mission to protect, promote, and advance the public health and safety of our nation and give us plenty to be proud. He feels honored to serve with his fellow officers.

## INNOVATOR from page 1

remains tethered to what it means to underfund or ignore public health.

Dr. Wen's medical background as an emergency physician positions her to being on the frontline of public health emergencies. Her work with community partners in Baltimore brought to bear innovative policies to combat the opioid epidemic. In our discussion about her impact in the community, she expounds on her efforts to meet the patient where they are. She states, "I want them to tell me their story, then I can advocate for their care." Her public health advocacy work is rooted in this principle, and as such, she envisions a health care system where patients receive fair and equitable access irrespective of their social economic status.

In her keynote speech, she insightfully explores the historical perspective of public health and why our nation's resolve in the development and distribution of COVID -19 vaccines is quintessential in the fight to mitigate public health crises. Dr. Wen calls upon our nations' leaders to fund global health programs that engage community partners and promote early physical health and wellness education programs. She concludes with earnest remarks to encourage us to advance public health initiatives within our agencies, communities, and households. As eloquently stated, in reaction to her book, our Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy, insistently says that Dr. Wen sees public health as the lifeline "that ensures citizens are not robbed of decades of life, and that where children live does not determine whether they live."

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In conclusion, I am grateful to the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation team and the Phoenix Commissioned Officers Association (COA) in selecting me to serve as the USPHS Aide de- Camp to Dr. Leana Wen. Lastly, I want to thank you, Dr. Wen, for your kindness, generosity and impeccable professionalism. You are indeed an exceptional public health innovator.



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# Early Age Reading- A Critical Point

by LCDR Marie Jeoboam and LT Hollis Reed

In March of 2022 the Catawba Service Unit (CSU) in Rock Hill, South Carolina became the 11th out of 12 eligible program sites to participate in the Reach Out & Read Program, a non-profit organization. After 3-1/2 years of planning we have successfully launched the CSU Reach Out & Read Program. The Reach Out & Read Program works with a large network of clinicians nationwide to deliver vital information about the importance of reading at routine wellness pediatric checkups.

Reach Out and Read program has the greatest reach of all early literacy programs serving families with young children— serving 4.2 million children annually. Half of the children served through this program are from low-income families. These checkups go from birth to age five—a period of critical brain development. Working with families through this reading program will put children on a path to success and set the stage for the rest of their lives. Families participating in the Reach Out and Read Program read more frequently to their children. This is highly impactful, as studies show time spent together reading aloud helps form lasting parent-child bonds and healthy brain development.

These children go on to have improved language and listening skills and enhanced fine and gross motor functions. This foundation also helps children develop healthy communications skills, patience, empathy, and lifelong love for reading—all of which are influential to success in school and beyond. The evidence is clear how successful this program truly is. The children who participated in the program had higher receptive and expressive language scores. Those children also had higher scores on the Home Literacy Orientation.

The positive lasting impact of this amazing program include:

- Better recognition of sounds and letters;
- Knowledge of a wider vocabulary;
- A deeper understanding of how stories work;
- Enhance understanding of the world and beyond;
- Help grow their imagination, curiosity, and memory.

## PRESIDENT from page 4

centralized command and control and a budget equal to the task of protecting the nation.

Fortunately, no new legislation is required to build the US Health Defense Force. No new administrative structure needs to be created. Every element needed to fully operationalize such a force already exists in the Commissioned Corps of the US Public Health Service. However, for decades, the USPHS has been underfunded and marginalized within the federal bureaucracy.

It is incontrovertible that our national security was harmed, that our people suffered, that our economy was damaged, and



LT Hollis Reed and LCDR Marie Jeoboam

How did we manage to do it? Lt Hollis Reed, the Nurse Supervisor worked tirelessly to engage the Reach Out & Read Program for our community. We were finally given the green light to complete provider training with an exam of completion. This was accomplished within a short window and all providers were excited to have this program initiated at our site for pediatric patients which includes over 96 patients. Finally, a representative from the program came to our site and provided an hour-long presentation, provided material and introduced our contact person. While overseeing the program Lieutenant Commander Marie Jeoboam noticed that this program not only distributes books to the patient but also the patient's siblings, sick children, and more. Though these factors are not the focus of the program, they have leveraged the understanding of inclusiveness. As one of the providers, LCDR Marie Jeoboam is looking forward to handing out her first book to a little one!

that our social cohesion and our politics were undermined by the COVID-19 pandemic, overlaid on a litany of chronic health problems that have been inadequately addressed for years. Let us help the public, the media, and our decision-makers understand that the PHS Commissioned Corps, our U.S. Health Defense Force, stands ready to take on today's and tomorrow's challenges. The PHS simply needs to be empowered by giving its leaders the resources they need and the operational control of servicemembers that every other uniformed service has. If we do that, our nation will be stronger and our people safer.

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- John McElligott, MPH, CPH, Board Member, National Board of Public Health Examiners
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# Annual Awards

## Health Leader of the Year – RADM (ret) Anthony S. Fauci

For over 50 years, Dr. Anthony S. Fauci has been a trusted and respected voice in the Public Health sector and has conducted a distinguished career in Federal biomedical research and policy development in the area of infectious diseases. Dr. Fauci has worked tirelessly as the trusted “voice of science” and evidence-based decision making in guiding our Nation and our World through the long and historic COVID-19 pandemic.



## Retiree of the Year Award – RADM (Ret) Paul Seligman

After retiring from 27 years of service, RADM Seligman continues to actively support the PHS and public health.. As the COF Chair of the Study, Research, and Grants Committee, RADM Seligman exhibits exceptional leadership where he oversees the Barclay-Giel Seed Grants.



## Local Branch Member of the Year – LCDR William Church

LCDR Church is a recognized leader in his community through his numerous acts of service and volunteerism. LCDR Church demonstrated superior participation and unwavering dedication to the Greater Texas Branch of the Commissioned Officers Association and COA at large.



## Local Branch Leader of the Year Award – LT Candice Todd

During her time in the Greater Texas Branch of the Commissioned Officers Association, LT Todd has proven to be a dedicated, selfless officer and leader. LT Todd devotes herself to building the branch and maintains a high level of officership. She oversees and advises six committees and serves approximately 100 DFW officers.



## Civilian Outstanding Support Award – Dr. Luis Padilla

Padilla's tireless efforts to develop effective Bureau of Health Workforce programs in local communities showed his commitment to the Corps' mission. The Bureau of Health Workforce administers over 40 workforce programs and connects skilled professionals with communities in need.



## Large Local Branch of the Year Award – DC Commissioned Officers Association

Despite the challenging condition imposed by COVID-19, the DC COA stayed busy representing the USPHS, supporting its officers, and increasing its membership. Their officers judged 700 student research projects at a regional science fair and reviewed over \$580,000 in Arlington Community Foundation Scholarships.



## Small Branch of the Year – Big Sky COA Montana

Though its members are spread out across the state of Montana, Big Sky COA has only increased their membership and improved their performance. The new leadership created recruitment materials and website and raised thousands of dollars for local organizations.



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# Diabetes Alert Day Virtual 5k Run

by LT Ying Lin, Ph.D., LT Paillet-Growl, MA, LCSW, LT Shakye Jones, MPH

On Saturday, March 26th, LTs Lin, Paillet-Growl, and Jones collaborated and co-led a virtual 5k for Diabetes Alert Day to promote diabetes awareness and an active lifestyle. Per the CDC, about 1 in 5 Americans living with diabetes, or 8.5 million people, are unaware that they have the disease. Overall, 17 PHS officers, stationed from Hawaii to the Washington, D.C. metro area, and several civilians completed the event in observance of Diabetes Alert Day. Below are a few of their stories.

LT Lin, a Scientist stationed at the FDA at White Oak, Maryland, led 2 of her

civilian friends, both of who have family members suffering from diabetes. LT Lin shared information with her friends on why physical activity is important for people with diabetes and motivated her friends to help their loved ones adopt an active lifestyle. She states, "we enjoyed the 5k run and were excited about this opportunity to promote diabetes awareness, prevention, and management through an active lifestyle".

LT Paillet-Growl, an HSO stationed at ACF, Washington, DC, engaged in a family walk/run with her husband, 9 year old daughter, and 8 year old son. The Paillet-Growl family engages in weekly hikes and

truly values the positive impact of physical activity on the body and the mind.

LT Shakye Jones, an HSO stationed at the Office of the Secretary in Washington, D.C., led a group of family and friends on a run to remind people of the importance of staying active to promote healthy living. LT Shakye Jones has a grandparent that no longer needs to take medication to maintain her diabetes and she accomplished this by changing her diet and going on daily walks around the city. Raising awareness about diabetes is near to her heart and she and her grandmother spend 5 evenings out of the week on a virtual walk/run together.

## Empowering Health, One Step at a Time

by LT Austin Van Horn, PharmD, BCPS

The 2022 Symposium and Surgeon Generals 5K (SG5K) were a great opportunity for officers to come together after more than 2 years of COVID restrictions. Even though we have all been getting used to the new normal, 2021 and 2022 have continued to be challenging years with the ups and downs of COVID and new variants and wondering at times if we would still be able to have an in-person symposium. In addition to all of this, most of the 14 officers of the SG5K planning team had not planned for an in-person race before, and those of us that had not planned an in-person race in over 2 years. The team rose to the challenge and created a great event.

From the very beginning, we wanted to make this event about supporting our fellow officers and creating an event that would get people excited to participate. From the very beginning, we felt the best way to do this would be to have an officer designed logo to help our fellow officers feel more engaged in the run and to have a more meaningful race logo. LT Julie Witmer submitted the winning design and slogan "empowering health, one step at a time." Her design was chosen for its simplicity and because it captured everything we wanted this race to be. We were hoping that the race would be a time for officers to either continue their healthy exercise habits, or maybe restart some exercise habits that COVID had disrupted. We also wanted to ensure that this event wasn't something only for those who could attend the symposium. We wanted to make sure that any officer, anywhere in the world had the ability to participate, so we created branch races and virtual races to make it easy to participate. The planning team encouraged officers to participate in branch races as much as

possible so that they could still get some of the same camaraderie that we were trying to foster through this event.

The in-person race in Glendale was especially meaningful to me to finally meet, in person, some of the other members of the SG5K planning team and various other workgroups. It was great to finally be able to put a face with the names and voices I have seen and heard over the past 2+ years. I know this was the case for many other officers, as well. The Glendale race, which hosted 300 participants, was also special for participants because Vice Admiral Murthy, Rear Admiral Hinton, and Captain Schobitz were at the finish line cheering on participants and talking individuals after the race. This presented an obvious boost in morale and showed officers how much they care about the Corps.

There were over 10 COA branch races across the country with over 100 officers participating in these branch races and in virtual races. While they may not have had the same "long lost friends" experience that I did, I know this event still served as an opportunity for officers to spend time together, something that seems increasingly difficult to do with hectic work schedules.

The planning team this year was made up of LCDR Matthew Ellis, CDR Rebel Nelson, CDR John Hubbard, LT Robert Todd, LCDR Jen Eng, LT Regena Hardy, CDR Rachelle Greene, LCDR Kayla Dewitt, LT Melina Upton Rodriguez, LT Cashmere Miller, LT Samora Casimir, and CAPT Janet Ciatte.

It was wonderful to exercise, enjoy the outdoors, and take one more step to a healthier tomorrow with my fellow officers across the country. If anyone is interested in helping lead the 2022 5K, please reach out to Austin.VanHorn@tchealth.org, or look out for a call for volunteers in the next few months.

# Walk With Your Pet Week

by CDR Wanda Wilson Egbe

The United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps Veterinary Officers supported mental health awareness from May 9 - May 15, 2022. During this week, the VetPAC conducted a public health messaging campaign and a national "Walk with your Pet Exercise Initiative" in communities across the globe. The objective of this initiative was to raise public awareness about the physical and mental health benefits of exercising with pets and engage communities in a fun outdoor activity. The activities conducted were aimed to promote social connectedness and personal health as we continue to cope with the obstacles created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The campaign was very successful. We tallied the engagement from across the country and here are the results:

- Facebook – 12 posts (10 public health messages with 25 photos.
  - +900 Likes
  - 27 comments
  - 7 Shares
- Twitter- ADM Rachel Levine - Sharing the ASH's tweet.
  - 17 Likes
  - 9 Retweets
  - 2 Quote Tweets



- Email - 15 public health messages sent, including to USPHS CC Senior Leadership.

Congratulations, Veterinary Category for demonstrating your unique One Health One Medicine approach to advancing public health. Thanks for also reminding us that we do not need a pet to go for walks outside and parks are a perfect place to enjoy outdoor activities. We would like to especially thank CAPT Tom Thomas, CAPT Danielle Buttke, CDR Wanda Wilson Egbe, and LCDR Angelina Williams for their exceptional efforts for this initiative.

## DC and VA COA Hosts a "Second Career After Retirement" Panel

by LCDR Christine Corser, PharmD

On April 29, 2022, the District of Columbia (DC) and Virginia (VA) Commissioned Officers Association (COA) co-hosted a retirement panel entitled, "Second Career After Retirement." The panel featured: CAPT Sonja Howard who is currently on terminal leave and will officially retire from the Commissioned Corps on July 1, 2022, CAPT Jason Woo (Ret.) who retired in August 2019 after 31 years of service, and CAPT Jay Seligman (Ret.). Over 90 USPHS Commissioned Corps officers joined to learn about the panelist's experiences and thoughts on retirement preparation, financial planning, and tips for starting other careers or professional projects after retiring from the Corps.

Each of the three panelists shared their recommendations on how to prepare for retirement and each panelist shared their unique post-USPHS endeavors, plans, and experiences. Hearing distinct recommendations from several officers was helpful because listeners could consider the various pieces of information shared, review the suggested resources, and determine what advice aligned with their own post-USPHS goals. CAPT Woo (Ret.) highlighted the value of being flexible throughout your career because your life situation, your priorities, and your interests

change over time—the plan that you envisioned at the start of your career may not be your plan as retirement approaches.

Each panelist highlighted the importance of timing in several instances, and from various lenses. First, start saving money towards your retirement as soon as you start working or as soon as you financially can—while starting early is ideal, it is never too late to start saving. Second, plan for retirement early and often; complete PHS retirement courses online, join other available courses (e.g., Transition Assistance Program (TAP)), and seek a transition specialist or retired officer mentor. CAPT Seligman (Ret.) reminded the participants, "the more time you have on your side to plan your retirement, the better off and more prepared you'll be." CAPT Woo (Ret.) shared that he attended his first retirement seminar approximately five years after commissioning and continued to attend more retirement courses as he progressed in his career. All panelists highlighted that you are a few years away from retirement it is especially important to attend retirement courses more routinely and often so that you are aware and fully understand the numerous retirement benefits. And lastly on the topic of timing, CAPT Howard expressed, "Plan, prepare, and live," and stressed the importance of creating a retirement checklist with specific timelines and sticking to those timelines.

# The Journey Begins” My first 90 days

by LT Shaneka Holmes, MSW, LCSW,  
BCD, MHA

I jumped through all the hoops and FINALLY met all the requirements. Now I am commissioned. It was one of the most exciting days of my life opening the email titled “Call to Active Duty.”

Now it is time for Virtual Officer Basic Course (OBC) 134/07. This was 2 weeks of intense virtual training. The virtual training consisted of sitting in front of your computer, camera on, hair to the back, clean white button up dress shirt, black slacks, black socks/stockings, and black shoes. Ready to learn promptly at 0845. The week included many sleepless nights and sore muscles. Late nights studying and workouts in preparation for the AFPT was very exhausting. The days were exciting and filled with an enormous amount of information. Those two weeks felt equivalent to training for a marathon. The process was extremely intense and was geared towards preparing officers for a career in the United States Public Health Services (USPHS). But through it all and in the end, I have a new profound respect for accountability.

Often, during class, you could expect strange things to happen with everyone visible on camera. While being in the privacy of your own home, daily tasks and routines continued. There were times when a classmate’s child, pet, or significant other would appear in the background. The excitement extended to include power outages, limited to no internet connections, doorbell interruptions of packages being delivered, constant bell notifications from GroupMe and WhatsApp. I had the best experience working and suffering with these group of people. It was our mission “Together We Move and Together We Overcome.”

Virtual OBC was a challenge and consisted of many pros and cons.

## Pros

- **Flexibility**-it was great to attend the training in the privacy of my own home.

- **Affordability**- I am sure that virtual OBC reduced the financial costs for the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps. Particularly because there were no travel, meals, or incidental costs required for attendees.

- **Learning styles**- virtual OBC had the ability to tap into a variety of learning styles. It was a benefit to be able to go back and listen to some of the audio and view many of the Power-Point presentations

- **Feedback**- the option of immediate feedback and response was available during our two-week training. When a question was asked, prompt responses were often received.

- **Relationships**- the accountability buddy concept allowed for us to hold one another accountable by creating the plan to finish the course strong.

## Cons

- Focusing on screen for long periods of time.
- Uniforms- I would say that I spent over \$3500 in uniforms. We were instructed to obtain our measurements from local seamstress then contact the Navy Exchange and the Coast Guard Exchange to order our uniforms over the phone. Over more than half of my class had issues with their uniform orders. Either the uniforms were the wrong sizes, or our orders were mixed up amongst our group. I was appreciative for the \$250 one-time uniform allowance, but it was not enough to cover the costs of uniforms along with much needed alterations.

- The lack of comradery with other officers to learn how to wear the uniform properly. How in the world do you put these pants in the boots? How do I roll up my sleeves? How in the world do you adjust this belt? I ordered the wrong patches, wrong belt, and you get the rest.



LT Shaneka Holmes, MSW, LCSW, BCD, MHA

- Distractions- Doorbell ringing, kids knocking on the door asking questions, pets in the background, packages being delivered, movers arriving.
- I continued to hear, “you are responsible for your own career.” But where is the outline? Where do I start? “What do I need to do now as a new officer?
- I am eligible for extra benefits? But how do I get them? “I need help filling out the forms correctly.”

Virtual graduation DONE! I must say I cried like a new baby on this day. To hear “LT Shaneka V. Holmes” filled my heart with joy and eyes with tears. I DID IT.

As social workers, we are equipped for obstacles that seem unbearable. We are resilient, resourceful creatures that always can conform in ANY given situation. Having to deal with the obstacles and cons, added additional tools to my knowledge box. Hopefully, my experience and sharing can help someone else. I am beyond excited about my privilege to be a USPHS officer! I am here to let the world know that social workers ROCK!



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# Spiritual Wellness

LCDR Katrina Redman, MT, SPOC, M.Div., Chaplain (BGCT)

## **"Do you think you can make it, Pilgrim?"**

I grew up watching westerns. John Wayne's character referred to other characters as "pilgrim" in two of his movies. The term was used to convey that the other person had journeyed into unfamiliar territory. Pilgrimage is a spiritual exercise that draws the individual into unfamiliar territory for the purpose of seeking guidance and closeness with God.

Many different belief systems encourage this spiritual exercise. The pilgrimage to Mecca in Islam may be the most publicized. It is also practiced in Christianity, Judaism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. It makes sense because spirituality is not a static state - it is a journey with many stages along the way, just like a pilgrimage.

There are many good reasons for taking a journey into unfamiliar territory: 1) by emulating the holy ones in our sacred texts we learn how to discipline ourselves in our daily lives; 2) it minimizes distractions in our prayer life; 3) it expresses both outward and inward worship and faith; 4) it brings perspective to the importance of our spiritual state; 5) it brings restoration after spiritual trauma; 6) it demonstrates self-sacrifice; and 7) it demonstrates trust in God and an active desire for guidance.

Even though a pilgrimage can be a long process that requires planning, resources, and time, the abovementioned benefits make it an unforgettable experience with long-term effects. Think of your current wellness. Is your spiritual state functioning well? Even if it is, could you benefit from pushing yourself further in your spiritual journey? Have you been wounded by something physically, mentally, or spiritually? Do you feel a need for spiritual restoration, guidance, and worship? A pilgrimage may be the key to your resilience!

We do difficult and complex work as PHS officers. There will be times when it just overwhelms us. Neglecting the very core of who we are and our purpose can have devastating effects. May we all have the discipline and the courage to challenge ourselves spiritually and to answer the longing in our souls for more.

### **Education: Native American Vision Quests**

A supernatural experience in which an individual seeks to interact with a guardian spirit to obtain advice or protection. The age, length, gender of participants, and intensity vary in different tribes. The preparation for the quest is normally preceded by a visit to a religious specialist, prayer, and fasting.

### **Spiritual Exercises**

1. Read about Christian pilgrimage in Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan.
2. Visit a spiritual leader and discuss pilgrimage to learn how to prepare for one.
3. Take a spiritual wellness assessment at <https://advancement.illinoisstate.edu/email/email-documents/SPIRITUAL-WELLNESS-ASSESSMENT-1.pdf>
4. Read an article on pilgrimage at [https://isha.sadhguru.org/uk/en/wisdom/article/why-do-people-go-on-pilgrimages?gclid=Cj0KCQjwwJuVBhCAARIsAOPwGASoKOqLysohFE6LtF1Z2yXZHNT97vnmy3JRh2RujXk0zUD0rszYbBwaAkzOEALw\\_wCB](https://isha.sadhguru.org/uk/en/wisdom/article/why-do-people-go-on-pilgrimages?gclid=Cj0KCQjwwJuVBhCAARIsAOPwGASoKOqLysohFE6LtF1Z2yXZHNT97vnmy3JRh2RujXk0zUD0rszYbBwaAkzOEALw_wCB).

Questions? Comments? Contact me at [khredman@hotmail.com](mailto:khredman@hotmail.com).



# Commissioned Corps Women's Issues Advisory Board is Here for You

by LCDR Carla Chase, CCC/SLP.D., LCDR Marissa Zwald, PhD, MPH, CDR Kiran M Perkins, MD, MPH, and CDR Titania Brownlee, DDS, MPH

Women are strong individuals who know how to adapt and overcome obstacles with confidence, while also building up the people around them. Women often fill a number of roles that are not limited to being a wife, mother, partner, organizer, administrator, director, economist, disciplinarian, teacher, health officer, and leader.

The Commissioned Corps Women's Issues Advisory Board (CCWIAB) was initiated in 2011 under the 18th U.S. Surgeon General, VADM Regina Benjamin, to address the 2009 Executive Order introduced by the White House Council on Women and Girls. CCWIAB's primary missions include the establishment of a synchronized federal response to address concerns that impact women and girls and to ensure that federal programs and policies sufficiently and effectively address such matters. CCWIAB not only identifies and analyzes crucial issues affecting women and families, but also provides recommendations to Commission Corps Leadership on opportunities to improve or initiate supportive policies to address issues impacting women officers. All Commissioned Corps officers benefit from the work of CCWIAB members.

CCWIAB consists of 12 voting members, one in each USPHS Category and a Flag Officer who serves as the Executive Chair. CCWIAB's new Executive Chair appointed by OSG effective March 31, 2022, is RDML Richardae Araojo, a pharmacist with over 18 years of experience at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). RDML Araojo has been an advocate for others as she serves as the Associate Commissioner for Minority Health and Director of the Office of Minority Health and Health Equity in the Office of the Commissioner at the FDA. RDML Araojo previously served as the Director of the Office of Medical Policy Initiatives (OMPI) in FDA's Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, where she managed the OMPI immediate office and three divisions. She is looking forward to her new role as Executive Chair of CCWIAB

as she champions the many policies and key issues impacting many women officers in the USPHS.

To meet its mission, CCWIAB activities include the review of current policies and recommending consideration for new policies and regulations. Examples of recent CCWIAB initiatives include updated female uniform and appearance regulations, recommendations to improve maternity and paternity leave policies, and proposed changes to post-partum weight standards, which help meet the needs of officers. CCWIAB, often in collaboration with other advisory groups, also develops resource guides for officers to help navigate various life events while being a PHS officer. Examples of CCWIAB-developed guides include those for expectant parents, those who may be getting married or divorced, officers who have had a stillbirth or pregnancy loss, and officers who are cancer survivors. Together with the Surgeon General's Policy Advisory Council, members of CCWIAB also developed breastfeeding guidance in the USPHS Personnel Operations Memorandum, which serves as a guide for officers who are nursing their newborns. CCWIAB has collected, analyzed, and disseminated results of the first USPHS Breastfeeding Survey to identify potential improvements to support breastfeeding officers.

Despite CCWIAB's many successes over the years in making a positive impact on women's issues, CCWIAB continues to look forward to addressing ongoing challenges. Current key issues that CCWIAB is tackling include deployment and readiness concerns, anti-harassment and discrimination concerns, infertility challenges, and parental leave policies, along with many other issues affecting women officers and their families. CCWIAB works collaboratively with other groups, such as the Women's Leadership Support Group and the Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity Advisory Group to address key issues alongside the Surgeon General's Policy Advisory Council. For more information about CCWIAB or to suggest an issue of interest for consideration, please contact your CCWIAB category or agency representative: <https://dcp.psc.gov/OSG/ccwiab>.

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# Memorial Day 2022

by Dave Corrigan, Deputy Director COA

It was an honor to represent COA at the annual Memorial Day Remembrance Ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery. Originally called Decoration Day, Memorial Day is celebrated to honor those who gave their life in service to the Nation. Though the U.S. Public Health Service may not deploy in the same capacity as other branches of service, we must not forget those in the USPHS that have served, currently serve, and on Memorial Day, those who have given their life. The feeling of frustration is often felt among officers when the USPHS is overlooked. However, it is refreshing to know that USPHS sits among our peers at these events. COA's Board Chair, Commander Kelly Valente and I were invited to watch the program from box seats overseeing the amphitheater.

During the event, President Biden, Secretary Austin (DoD), and General Milley (Chairman JCS) all spoke about their feelings on the meaning of Memorial Day and how to best honor those who have given their life in service to our nation. Though the President knows the feeling of loss of a family member from illness sustained during service, and the Secretary and Chairman know the feeling off combat losses within their ranks, their messages were uplifting. The somber tone that naturally clouds Memorial Day was overwhelmed by a message of pride, service, and remembrance of the selfless life our servicemembers led.

After their remarks, the Veterans and Military Service Organizations (MSOs and VSOs) were invited to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. As seen in the photo to the right, Commander Valente and her 9-year-old son, Brady MacFarland, presented the wreath to the Honor Guard at the front of the Tomb. Understanding the feeling of visiting the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is something that can only be explained by the experience of being present. It was an honor to share that experience with CDR Valente, Brady, the honor guard, and the hundreds of onlookers.

Though the heat was unforgiving, the ceremony at Arlington was a capstone to what was a phenomenal day. Earlier in the day, I was invited to join a breakfast in the East Room of The White House with many of our partners in the MSO and VSO community. We were bused from Fort Myer and led into The White House for coffee while we went for a self-guided tour. Though I seldom visit museums or art shows, I was struck by some of the pieces hanging on the walls. My favorite was a painting gifted to The White House during the Kennedy Presidency of Independence Hall during the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Though most of the art on the walls, and all the books in the library, are by American artists and authors, this painting was a gift from an artist in India. And though it was one of the least expensive paintings, it is considered one of the most valuable. Breakfast was served while some of our military's highest ranking leaders filtered in.



*Immediate Past Chair CDR Kelly Valente and her son Brady MacFarland before laying wreath on Memorial Day.*

We were joined by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Milley, the Chief of Naval Operations and the chiefs of staff of the Army, Coast Guard, and Airforce. When President Biden joined us, it was obvious he just came from a meeting with Gold Star Families. His demeanor was solemn and his speech was quiet. He reflected on the servicemembers from the families he just met with, from Vietnam-era to the last days of the withdrawal from Afghanistan, and also on his son Beau. Coincidentally, Memorial Day 2022 marked the 7th anniversary of Beau's death. He spoke for a short time and spent the rest of the time walking around from table-to-table to meet with the other servicemembers and Gold Star Families in attendance. Though the room was heavy, his humor was created good balance and we ended the morning on a good note.

The invitation to the Arlington ceremony and the last-minute invitation to visit The White House to eat breakfast with the President was unexpected but I am forever grateful for the opportunity. I would be remiss if I didn't use the time I had to discuss advocacy efforts by COA for USPHS officers. As expected, many of the servicemembers in attendance did not know much about USPHS. With that said, connecting with the other MSOs and VSOs in attendance was a great way to build allies for when it comes time for advocating on Capitol Hill. I am optimistic about the future of COA and the Commissioned Corps and am honored to serve as your new Deputy Director.

# OBITUARY

Rear Admiral (ret.) John T. Babb, USPHS

Rear Admiral John T. Babb, USPHS (ret.) passed away June 14, 2022 in Collierville, TN. John was born in Cassville, MO to BF and Eleanor Babb. He was blessed with a brilliant intellect and a lifelong desire to serve others. After spending over 20 years practicing community pharmacy in the private sector, he joined the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) in 1989. Throughout his distinguished career, he was the Director of the National Pharmacy Program and Chief of Health Programs for the Federal Bureau of Prisons and the Director of the Office of Force Readiness and Deployment in the Office of the Surgeon General. He also served as a Regional Health Administrator.

He served in the USPHS medical responses to the September 11th attacks in New York, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania. RADM Babb coordinated the response and recovery efforts

following hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma. Upon his retirement, he was recognized by the Commissioned Officers Association as the "Father of Modern Public Health Response." After retirement, John found another love - writing. His writing career sustained him throughout the years as his health failed and he was the proud author of seven published books.



John will be missed by his wife, Victoria; their four children, Kim (Sean), Kariann, Kevin (Mindy) and Matt; and his treasured grandchildren Hunter (Megan), Grace, Nicholas, Emma and Nathan. Additionally, he leaves behind two siblings, Joe Babb (Kathy) and Julie Mathis (Chuck), as well as several nieces and nephews. He will be buried in West Tennessee Veteran's Cemetery.

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR from page 1

speaker for the event was Dr. Richard Southby, Distinguished Professor Emeritus at George Washington University. The dinner concluded by recitation of an original, expressive poem by Captain Karen Munoz titled "We Fight Too!" The poem was so impactful to Adm. Levine that she asked Capt. Munoz to recite the poem at the plenary session to all attendees the following day. It was difficult to spot a dry eye after Karen's touching performance.

Tuesday's action-packed agenda kicked-off at 6 a.m. with the Annual Physical Fitness Test (APFT) and the Surgeon General's 5K Run/Walk at Heroes Regional Park. Runners were especially excited by a surprise visit by the scheduled keynote speaker, Dr. Leana Wen, who not only ran the 5K race with officers, but stayed afterwards to chat and take pictures with fellow runners. After returning to the hotel to grab a quick breakfast, attendees assembled in the Main Solana for Opening Ceremonies hosted by RADM (Ret.) Steve Solomon, the 2020-2022 President of the COF Board of Trustees, where attendees were treated to a rendering of an "Honor Song" from the Fort Peck Assiniboine & Sioux Tribe of Montana. This original song was written to recognize the significant contributions of U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps officers to Indian Country. Following an excellent keynote address by Dr. Leana Wen titled "Lessons for the Future of Healthcare and Public Health," the annual Commissioned Officers Association (COA) membership meeting was held, with many COA awards presented (see page 17). At this meeting, COA's Chair of the Board of Directors and I had the opportunity to share COA's new logo, tagline, and a preview of the new website which generated quite a bit of excitement. Following the membership meeting, attendees had unopposed time in the schedule to allow them time to visit over one hundred exhibit booths to learn about the latest and greatest in the world of scientific devices, pharmaceuticals, and academic programs.

Later in the day officers were treated to the 2022 Luther Terry Lecture by RADM Rick Childs, titled "Augmenting the Commissioned Corps'

Deployment Capability to Respond to Public Health Emergencies Through Integrated Real-Time Data Analysis and Reporting." Afternoon events culminated by leadership presentations by Adm. Levine, Vice Adm. Murthy, the Deputy Surgeon General, Rear Adm. Denise Hinton, and the new CCHQ Director, Capt. Rick Schobitz. Attendees seemed to especially appreciate the nearly 1-hour, unscripted Q&A session held by the four senior leaders. The evening concluded with an exceptionally well-attended musical performance by the Surgeon General's USPHS Commissioned Corps Music Ensemble, "The Surgeon Generals Own." The smiles in the crowd were infectious, and attendees enjoyed themselves tremendously.

Category Day events on May 25th were extremely successful, with the ASH, DSG, and CCHQ Director visiting the rooms to chat and take photos. The final day of the event, May 26th, began with Minority Officers Liaison Council (MOLC) and Junior Officer Advisory Group (JOAG) breakfasts and awards events, both with enthusiastic attendance. The MOLC event included a fabulous cultural awareness training event and performance by "AChem A'al" (We Children), a team of the Co-op Village Traditional Pima Basket Dancers from the Gila River Indian Community. Kicking off the Scientific sessions following the breakfasts was a passionate keynote address by VADM (Ret.) Richard Carmona, 17th Surgeon General of the United States, titled "Chasing Uniformed Service Parity as an Essential but Invisible Corps."

The adage "a picture is worth a thousand words" is rings true. If you haven't had a chance to do so, I encourage you to visit the COF website where you can view hundreds of pictures from the 2022 USPHS Scientific & Training Symposium. You will undoubtedly see many familiar faces. We look forward to seeing you at the 2023 USPHS Scientific & Trainign Symposium in Tulsa, Oklahoma May 8-11, 2023! Until next month!

# PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation

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## We Welcome New Members of COA, May 1 - June 30, 2022

LT Jing Tassone *Maryland*

Mr. Logan Freese-Hill *Virginia*

LT Curtis Hagerman *Colorado*

LTJG Emma Rary *Oklahoma*

CDR Andrew Yang *Maryland*

LT Andrew Ejiofor *Georgia*

LT Carrie Scott *Louisiana*

Ms Tine Hansen-Turton *Pennsylvania*

LT Frantishka McCrimmon *Maryland*

LTJG Malia Howard *Florida*

CAPT Janie Kirvin *Texas*

LT Geng Tian *Maryland*

LCDR Anita Manns *Michigan*

LT Shifawu Odunsi *Georgia*

LCDR Regan Harp *Tennessee*

LT DeShonna Mitchell *Baltimore*

LTJG Caitlin Caldwell *New Mexico*

### RETIREMENT

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It was an engaging discussion from start-to-finish and officers felt comfortable asking questions on various topics. LCDR Yvon Yeo and LCDR Candice Karber, members of DC COA, facilitated the panel discussion and efficiently and succinctly summarized the numerous questions and comments submitted in real-time by fellow officers. The panel responded to the posed questions and offered recommendations and information on VA disability assessments, retirement classes, entrepreneurial advice to start a new business, retiree healthcare coverage, transitions to the private sector, and more. Retirement resources mentioned throughout the discussion, as well as a recording of the panel, are available on the DC COA Career Development and Education webpage: <https://www.dccoa.org/career-development>.

The audience was reminded that many of us will retire young and retirement involves moving to the next stage in life, which may include a second career. The parting words from each panelist were inspiring and reminded us to appreciate the connections and opportunities we have now in the Commissioned Corps but to also think ahead about what we want to do after retiring from the Corps. CAPT Seligman (Ret.) wrapped it up well, "create your next chapter, how do you envision yourself after the Corps? As you can see the three of us are on three different paths, but we reinvented ourselves, we did the things we want, we got our dreams and desires. Plan, plan, plan, and do not wait until the last minute because you want to manage your future, you do not want the future to manage you."

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