COF Awards RADM Michael Fellowship to Three Officers

by Lynn Abrahamson, MPH, RN, Grants Manager

The PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF) will provide funding for three officers to attend the University of Maryland School of Public Health Certificate Program beginning in the fall of 2022 as recipients of the RADM Jerrold M. Michael Fellowship. The funding is valued at approximately $12,000 per student. The fellows include LT Ebony Jackson Clark, LCDR Jamillah Dionisia Bynum, and CDR Rachael Leigh Cook.

The Foundation established the program in 2009 to honor the late Rear Admiral Jerrold M. Michael. He was an engineer officer who had a lifelong passion for improving public health education. The devotion RADM Michael had for both the USPHS Commissioned Corps and academia is legendary. RADM Michael was Dean of the University of Hawaii (UH) School of Public Health from 1972 to 1992. He continued as a professor of public health until 1995. He later served as Professor Emeritus at UH and as an adjunct professor of global health at the Milken Institute School of Public Health, George Washington University.

After receiving notification of the fellowship, Lieutenant Ebony Jackson Clark, PT, DPT wrote that “Pursuing a global health certificate will enhance my understanding of global health engagement, allowing me to be a better asset to my agency and the USPHS and assist me with reaching my goals of alleviating healthcare disparity and improving healthcare.” She currently works as a physical therapist with the Chinle Comprehensive Health Care Facility with the Indian Health Service. In her application, LT Jackson Clark wrote that working on the Navajo reservation has increased her commitment to healthcare disparity and health education issues.

Lieutenant Commander Jamillah Dionisia Bynum, MSW, LCSW, BCD stated that “I am aware that I will be serving at every level of ensuring our country is able to prepare, mitigate, respond, and recover from disasters. Obtaining the global health certificate will provide me with a better understanding of global public health and evidence-based promotion strategies I can use to improve social, political, and environmental health inequities.” A clinical social worker, LCDR Bynum is a member of the Public Health Emergency Response Strike Team (PERST) with the Office of the Surgeon General Commissioned Corps Headquarters. PHERST responds to emergent regional, national, and global public health emergencies.
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

U.S. Park Passes Advocacy Update
by Dave Corrigan, COA Deputy Director

As we all know, the USPHS is the only uniformed service that has servicemembers assigned to the US Park Service and its over 400 national parks. Though USPHS officers have a strong history of keeping the parks clean and safe for the 318 million annual visitors, they must pay for entry into the parks for them and their family while off duty. By executive action, the Trump administration started to provide free entry into US National Parks for military and veterans. Unfortunately, the executive order missed the opportunity to provide these passes free of charge to USPHS officers. By legislative action in the Alexander LoFgren Veterans in Parks (VIP) Act in 2021, Congress was able to codify lifetime free parks passes for veterans, military, and gold star families. Again, this missed the opportunity to provide these passes to all eight uniformed services and inadvertently excluded USPHS and NOAA.

COA began advocating for free parks passes years ago but had zeroed in on this issue last year before the VIP Act was passed. COA leadership, the legislative affairs committee, and our lobbyist did their best to get the bill amended before being passed into law. Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful.

One of COA’s goals in 2022 was to amend the VIP Act through an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Again, COA leadership, the LA committee, and our lobbyist worked tirelessly to ensure USPHS has parity with the other branches.

We met with the staff of multiple US Representatives and US Senators on both sides of the aisle. We also met with staff on the following committees: Senate Energy and Commerce; House Natural Resources and House Subcommittee on National Parks. Between meeting with these offices, our internal meetings, constant phone calls, and countless emails, your COA leadership spent dozens of hours fighting for parity. Despite our best efforts, we were again unsuccessful in changing the law to allow USPHS officers free admission to our national parks. Some offices expressed a concern with the cost of increasing the number of visitors to the parks while decreasing revenue. Others were not interested in the heavy lift that this effort would take on the individual legislator’s end.

No matter what the reason for denying our request, we kept pushing. USPHS officers and their families deserve the same benefits as other services. After the past two years of pandemic response, USPHS has proven its importance more than ever. We will continue to fight for parity with the other services to ensure USPHS officers receive what they deserve. Our legislative priorities will continue to prioritize being proactive to ensure laws include USPHS officers by using the term uniformed services instead of the traditional term armed forces. This is a matter of fairness and we will continue to stand by your side in this constant fight.
Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) is a joint training opportunity that increases deployment readiness by providing uniformed services hands-on field training opportunities while also benefitting American communities with key medical services at no-cost. This year Kodiak, Alaska received over 200 officers and enlisted personnel from various services, including the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, and National Guard. The following services were provided: health exams, dental care, optometry, podiatry, physical therapy, veterinary care, behavior health, and public health education.

Amongst the uniformed services presence, the Public Health Service is commonly less known—with officers often being misidentified as part of the U.S. Coast Guard due to similar operational dress uniform. Even though the existence of the USPHS Commissioned Corps has been around for over 200 years, it is still the branch of service that is often overlooked. However, despite being a much smaller service, the Public Health Service’s participation in IRT Alaska helped solidify its role as a vital resource for providers and leaders. In part due to the nature of the Public Health Service, our officers were able to integrate with other services presenting a united front in support of the mission and in providing care to the community.

With only 18 officers from USPHS present amongst the other uniformed services that pervaded the IRT mission in Kodiak, Alaska, the Public Health Service was able to prove its value. During this IRT, my cohort and I were eager to inform other service members, and local citizens, about the Public Health Service and our mission. However, our actions spoke louder than words. In total, our members contributed to the overall success of the mission by visiting 7 sites, seeing 2,195 patients, and providing 6,129 procedures with an estimated fair market value of $503,581.00 in under a span of two weeks. After seeing our contributions, the Public Health Service was recognized not only by our sister services as an equal, but also by the locals for our leadership, knowledge, expertise, diligence, and teamwork.

I was called active duty in September 2021 and have served as a nurse officer with the Public Health Emergency Strike Team (PHERST). The idea of working alongside other services and the uncertainty of what to expect at an IRT was nerve-wrecking. Fortunately, working alongside other Public Health Service officers, whom I now call mentors, I was provided with prime examples of what it means to serve and represent USPHS to its fullest. The years of service, wisdom, knowledge, and guidance provided by the abovementioned Public Health Service officers were invaluable to the success of 2022 IRT Arctic Care.

To be part of IRT was an invaluable, informational, and rewarding experience. Not only did I gain knowledge of how other services operate, but I also built everlasting relationships that supersede any expectations that I had. The fellowship with other Public Health Service officers, uniformed services, and the locals was substantial to my growth and learning experience. Additionally, I was able to apply my clinical knowledge, act as a mentor, and provide support to areas where needed.

It is an honor to be part of a small workforce that speaks volumes. The Public Health Service is, without a doubt, a necessary entity with immense opportunities. The room for growth and expansion is limitless and I hope to see the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps’ presence and awareness continue to grow.
by Randall J.F. Gardner, RADM (ret.)
BSEE, P.E., MEM

Fellow Commissioned Officers, friends, and allies, I would like to re-introduce myself, RADM (ret.) Randall J.F. Gardner, as the new President of the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation (COF) for the Advancement of Public Health. Throughout my career, I served in FDA, NIH, OASH, and HIS. Though it is hard to believe it has been over four years, I retired as the 13th Chief Engineer of the US Public Health Service in 2018. I am in awe at your service to our country, and the globe, the past few years – it is amazing what active-duty officers have accomplished during such trying times.

I would like to thank the COF Board, past and present, for their continued service to the Commissioned Officers of the US Public Health Service. More specifically, I’d like to thank RADM (ret.) Steve Solomon, the Immediate Past President of COF, for his dedication and leadership the past year as president. I look forward to learning from him and working with him during my tenure as president. This past year has been incredible, and I will work hard to carry that momentum through 2023. Steve has lined up opportunities for our future success and I am calling on all of you to continue to find ways to contribute to the efforts of COF. We also need to find other volunteers to join our efforts and support COF in the future.

It is important to remember that we are capable of bounding great hurdles to accomplish our goals. If we do it together, your time, talents, and financial contributions will help improve the future of COF and our Commissioned Corps. I recognize that these are difficult times and many of us are exhausted. However, if we work together, it can be fun and rewarding. Over the years, I have seen the Commissioned Corps stand up and do things others didn’t even know we could do. You efforts during the last two years of pandemic response have been an embodiment of what USPHS Officers are capable of.

Let’s join together to support ourselves and the future generations of officers. In the short term, it is critical that we make every effort to support COF’s documentary effort. As you know, COA and COF have joined with a producer, Christopher Productions LLC, to create a one-hour PBS documentary on the USPHS called Invisible Corps. This film will bring attention to USPHS and reinvigorate many officers to get involved. If you or a friend would like to contribute financially, please visit phscof.org/donate.

If you would like to contribute your time in the future, we are always looking for future board members. We are also looking for future members to serve on our five committees: Development; Education; Finance and Audit; Nominations; and Studies, Research, and Grants. This is a great way for retired officers to reengage with COF and our Commissioned Corps and mentor junior officers.

In closing, I look forward to working with the COF and COA boards and the many volunteers that support our active-duty officers and their families. There is nothing more important to COF than the morale and welfare of those who serve in the advancement of public health. Congratulations CDR Purdy as the incoming COA Board Chair. I look forward to a great year serving at your side!
It’s been over a year since the USPHS commissioned its first Ready Reserve officers. Like all PHS Officers, Ready Reserve (RR) officers support the USPHS Commissioned Corps’ capacity to respond to regional, national, and global health emergencies to improve access to health services. Unlike active duty officers, Ready Reserve officers are not assigned to one agency. Currently, there are just over three dozen RR officers. Five of those officers attended the 2022 Commissioned Officer Association Scientific and Training Symposium in Glendale, Arizona in May. All five RR Officers who attended were among the first groups of Ready Reservists to commission. LTJG Pamela Myers, LTJG Celeste Gearhart, LTJG Christopher Ruppert, and LTJG Evan Williams were commissioned with the inaugural class of reservists in July 2021, while LTJG Adam Gilbertson was commissioned with the second class in August 2021.

LTJG Pamela Myers, an HSO (Region 3), was excited to attend the symposium to help represent the RR. While there, she attended the Anchor and Caduceus dinner and being the most junior officer, she was selected to do the traditional cake cutting with the highest-ranking officer, Assistant Secretary for Health, ADM Rachel Levine (ASH).

LTJG Celeste Gearhart, a nurse (Region 4), joined because she wanted to serve in a dynamic capacity where she could go on a variety of missions on a part-time basis. During the symposium she attended nursing category sessions and enjoyed the exhibit booth hall. She noted that some officers she interacted with had never met a reservist. She was honored to represent the Ready Reserve at the symposium, explaining that reservists are dedicated and share the same overall mission as our active component.

LTJG Adam Gilbertson, a physical therapist (Region 4), enjoyed attending the panel session that included the ASH, Surgeon General Vice Admiral Vivek H. Murthy, Deputy Surgeon General Rear Admiral Denise Hinton, and CCHQ Director Captain Rick Schobitz. The main impact of the symposium on LTJG Gilbertson was a confirmation that he made the right decision to join. The teamwork on display from fellow officers across categories was inspiring. “Hearing the Surgeon General speak to the variety of health missions, and state of the Corps was a great experience,” he said.

LTJG Christopher Ruppert, a nurse (Region 2), joined because of a deep desire to serve and give back to the underserved. Before joining the Ready Reserve, LTJG Ruppert worked with many USPHS officers as a nurse in DMAT for 10 years. With his experience in DMAT, he wanted to join the USPHS Ready Reserve so he could give back some of what he has learned throughout his career in support of the USPHS mission. LTJG Ruppert attended most sessions, but was most excited to attend the PHERST and Ready Reserve sessions to see the regional command team talk about Ready Reserve with such pride and accomplishment.

LTJG Evan Williams, an academic pharmacist (Region 9), is the COA Board of Directors representative for the Ready Reserve. At the Symposium, LTJG Williams was pleased to have had the opportunity to articulate and explain directly to CCHQ leadership some policy shortcomings as they apply to reservists. He also explained other inequities USPHS reservists face compared to regular corps officers or reservists in other services, noting that he “was encouraged that some of these issues were acknowledged by CCHQ leadership, and that everyone seemed to want to right the process.” Regarding the Symposium, LTJG Williams said “It is great to be a part of something larger than myself. To see so many other dedicated officers ready to answer the call and serve the needs of the nation was inspiring.”

Since the start of the Ready Reserve, drills have been virtual due to legislative barriers. Thus, it was agreed among all the reservists that a big component of the conference was the chance to finally meeting officers in person. LTJG Ruppert and Gilbertson agreed that attending the conference provided a sense of camaraderie, a sense of togetherness among the RR that attended, and opportunities to network within the Corps. LTJG Gilbertson and Gearhart also mentioned that they enjoyed being able to meet some of their OBC classmates. The reservists also appreciated the opportunity to advocate for themselves and explain their role and the barriers they faced to fellow officers. These reservists are committed to developing a dynamic Ready Reserve Corps to meet the needs of the Corps and the nation. Be on the lookout for our teammates and welcome them aboard!
by Kristie Purdy, MS, RDN/LD, BC-ADM, CDCES, Board Chair, COA

Chair, COA Board of Directors

As PHS officers, we know far too well the challenges of not working alongside our fellow officers. Much of the PHS culture is foreign to the civilians within our agency. We’re not afforded the opportunity to work on a base or installation, where a sense of camaraderie is built into the culture of daily activities.

Camaraderie is the essence of what binds us together as a service. It provides a cohesiveness among the individual members, allowing the unit to function effectively as a collective entity. The spirit of camaraderie stems from a shared experience – from attending Officer Basic Course (OBC), deployment, or working together in our respective PACs. As we get into the rhythm of the daily grind at our respective duty stations, surrounded by a civilian workforce, we all too frequently lose the sense of camaraderie amongst our fellow officers.

We can gain back this sense of camaraderie through membership in COA. COA offers the opportunity to strengthen ties amongst our fellow officers and foster esprit de corps. Through COA, we are afforded the chance to learn each other’s stories and challenges. We’re able to build trusted relationships, connect amongst the ranks, and ultimately enhance the mission of PHS while building our own morale.

With the number of responsibilities we tend to on a daily basis, it’s understandable to assume joining and being active in an association is low on the priority list. After a full day of meetings, projects, and/or patients, it’s hard to add yet another item to our daily “to-do” list, especially if the meeting or activity is voluntary.

One of the greatest opportunities COA provides is the chance to invest in your professional development. Beyond the discounts and scholarship opportunities, COA is a space to build trusted relationships and camaraderie with fellow officers. There is nothing in the civilian workforce that can approximate the bonding that occurs amongst officers. Because we’re all in it together – we get through it together. COA officers the “welcome to the club” experience that awaits other services when they report to their duty station. COA, in a sense, is our version of a base and shared space between our members connecting us to our community.

If you’re not currently a member of COA, I invite for you to become one. If you are a member, remind others to renew their membership and encourage those who are not members to become one.

There is strength in membership. The reality is, the more members we gain, the better we are situated as an association to continue to provide and advocate for our membership. The more members we gain, the more we can do for you! Without membership, we do not have the revenue to serve as a legislative aide and advocate for officers on Capital Hill to fight for your rights, benefits, and be your voice in front of legislators so our members receive parity with the armed services.

COA represents the interests of all officers of the Corps. While there are many “member only” benefits COA members are privileged to, there are many non-members benefiting from the resources and services COA provides without sharing in the cost of membership. These members are gaining a free ride on your membership.

Join or renew your membership in COA, so we may continue to ensure the only organization solely representing the interests of PHS officers remains strong and continues to grow!

AWARDS from page 1

In her fellowship application, Commander Rachael Leigh Cook, Pharm.D., MPH, CPH, NHDP-BC wrote that “Completing the Certificate in Global Health will increase my understanding of global health and improve my ability to apply my knowledge of global health to both CDC and USPHS international responses. I would feel more confident in my knowledge of global health and would be able to apply the tools I learn through the certificate program to solve real-world challenges that emerge both domestically and abroad.” CDR Cook currently serves as a Regulatory Affairs Officer with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Office of Infectious Disease.

The Foundation congratulates all three officers for their interest in seeking continuing education to improve the health of the communities they serve. COF would also like to thank the donors who make this program possible and the volunteers who reviewed the fellowship applications. For more information, please visit: https://www.phscof.org/scholarships/radm-michael-fellowship/
COA Emails Landing in Your Spam Folder?

by Dave Corrigan, COA Deputy Director

“You’ve Got Mail.” The memorable notification we remember from the early days of email. I’m sure we have all moved to a quiet or silent email notification, but sometimes we unknowingly receive no notification at all. Have you ever wondered why you haven’t been getting any emails from COA? Have you checked your spam or junk folder?

Recently, we have been hearing that some members have not been receiving the monthly update, membership emails, or the periodic event reminders. As is with any mass email service, our Association Management System, iMIS, occasionally drops our emails into a recipient’s junk or spam folder. This is an issue across the board with associations and may not have a permanent solution in the short term.

With that said, there are ways to mitigate it for the few members who it affects. Please check your spam and junk folder on a frequent basis just to make sure you don’t miss anything. Additionally, if you use your work email address for your membership account, you can add your personal email address as the secondary, increasing the chance you will receive the emails. As always, COA leadership is here to assist if you have any issues and need our help.

Pay it Forward: Serving Future Generations of Physical Therapists

by LCDR William Church and LT Sarah Lyrata

For the past two years, CDR(sel) William Church and LCDR(sel) Sarah Lyrata, U.S. Public Health Services officers, have spent their extra time as adjunct faculty at Baylor University Doctor of Physical Therapy program. As subject matter experts in the fields of wound care, they were recruited by core faculty member CAPT(ret.) Jessica Feda to teach the second year doctorate level physical therapy students for the Management of Complex Patients course. LCDR(sel) Lyrata also assisted with lab for the Advanced Patient Management course both years.

CDR(sel) Church and LCDR(sel) Lyrata provided key input and instruction during the Management of Complex Patients course. The course work involves the grading of clinical pathology projects, virtual oral exams, lab immersion skills, competency assessments, and face-to-face interaction with patients identified as volunteers from the community. The topics covered by CDR(sel) Church and LCDR(sel) Lyrata in the lab immersion and competency assessment portion of the course included negative pressure wound therapy, total contact cast application and removal, and wound debridement including irrigation, pulse lavage, and ultrasonic mist.

Over 175 students were directly impacted by CDR(sel) Church and LCDR(sel) Lyrata’s instruction, which contributed to their success in completing the Management of Complex Patients lab. These doctoral level physical therapy students were provided a unique opportunity to interact with two U.S. Public Health Service officers, practicing full-time as therapists. And the therapist officers truly enjoyed paying forward their time and experience to the next generation of clinicians.

CDR Church(sel) holds a Doctorate of Physical Therapy and is board-certified Geriatric Certified Specialist through the American Physical Therapy Association and a Certified Wound Specialist. He serves the Federal Bureau of Prisons and is stationed at the Fort Worth Federal Medical Center. LCDR (sel) Lyrata holds a Doctorate of Physical Therapy and is a Board-Certified Neurologic Physical Therapist and Certified Wound Specialist. She is stationed at Indian Health Service in Anchorage, AK.
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How Speech Language Pathologists are Helping Fight COVID-19

by LCDR Carla Chase and LT Gernise Dixon

Having our poster selected to be in this year’s 2022 USPHS Scientific Training Symposium was amazing and exciting for LT Gernise Dixon and me. After a three-week deployment to a California hospital that was utilized for patients diagnosed with COVID-19, LCDR Chase became deeply interested in hospitalized patients diagnosed with COVID-19, hypoxia, and dysphagia (difficulty swallowing). In the beginning of June 2022, in the United States, the seven-day average of people being diagnosed with COVID-19 who were hospitalized was over 23,000 per day. The published literature is not clear about how many patients who test positive for COVID-19 are admitted to the hospital with hypoxia, nor of those who also have dysphagia.

Upon observations of patients with COVID-19, who also had hypoxia, and required a nasal cannula and non-rebreather for supplemental oxygen, LCDR Chase performed a clinical swallow evaluation and determined that some of the patients also had dysphagia, which was further complicating their recovery and outcome. The hypoxia that these patients experienced was not as one would expect with someone gasping for air to take a breath. It was silent hypoxia, meaning the patients were unaware that their blood oxygen saturations were falling into dangerously low levels when they were trying to do simple tasks, such as sit up, talk, and eat.

After more than 100 encounters in this hospital setting, LCDR Chase began to prescribe and recommend much needed compensatory strategies that seemed to assist the patients with preventing aspiration and help them maintain adequate nutrition and hydration, while trying to fight off COVID-19. She found that the usual swallow safety guidelines that are recommended by speech language pathologists (SLPs) had to be modified to meet the needs of patients in this setting with these diagnoses of COVID-19, hypoxia, and dysphagia. For example, SLPs would normally recommend patients sit up at a 90-degree angle for all food oral intake, but some of the patients diagnosed with COVID-19 had oxygen saturations that would drop below 90 percent if they were not in certain positions. So, LCDR Chase worked with the hospital staff to find the most optimal positions to keep each patient as safe as possible while getting in as much food and water in as possible. She educated the patient on the alternate respiration devices showing them how to read the oximeter and when to use the call light to call for help. LCDR Chase also trained the patients and staff on proper positioning of the oximeter for the patients’ safety and awareness, since they had silent hypoxia. She found that the compensatory strategies were working, and patients and staff were noticing the difference in the survival rate.

LT Dixon and I later completed literature reviews to find out what the published science recommends for patients with these three diagnoses. We found that, although there is more literature addressing COVID-19 and hypoxia than there was in January 2021, there is not much literature concerning all three of these diagnoses which can affect the health outcomes of those impacted. All of this information was a part of our poster at the symposium. Junior officers like us are thankful for the opportunity to share our knowledge with officers who stopped by our poster, including our Deputy Surgeon General, RADM Denise Hinton. RADMN Hinton shared her own personal experience and knowledge of what we do as speech language pathologists and encouraged us to continue our quest to find answers and save lives. Thank you RADM Hinton, you are inspiring us to continue the public health mission – to promote, protect, and advance the health and safety of our nature – foreign, domestic, and microscopic.
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Supporting Our Local Veterans on Flag Day

by LT Jazmin Reed, PhD, MPH & LT Christine Nappa, LCSW

“What can USPHS do to help?” That was CDR Stephanie Felder’s immediate thought on Saturday, May 28 when she received a listserv announcement for the 2022 Washington, DC Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) Health and Information Fair to be held on June 14 (Flag Day) at the Access Housing, Inc./Southeast Veterans Center. She contacted Mr. Walter Elmore, the event coordinator, and he indicated that they were in need of hygiene/healthcare kits to hand out to underserved and homeless veterans in the DC area who would be attending the event.

As both a member of the Public Health Emergency Response Strike Team (PHERST) and the District of Columbia (D.C.) branch of the Commissioned Officers Association (COA) Veteran and Military Outreach committee, CDR Felder was able to coordinate a PHERST – D.C. COA joint team and launch an online donation drive by June 3. LCDR Jamillah Bynum and CDR Carla Burch led the efforts with support from other officers including LT Christine Nappa. The team requested donations of healthcare and hygiene items (e.g., toothbrushes, shaving razors, feminine hygiene products, hand sanitizer, laundry pods) be received by June 10. The team received donations from twenty officers and two civilians – more than enough to meet the goal of 200 kits. Nine officers participated in assembling the kits prior to the event. Three officers were able to personally distribute the kits to 67 veterans that attended the fair despite the inclement weather. The remaining kits were left with the organization to distribute to their patrons at a later date.

LT Nappa noted that the officers’ inherent skills allowed for a quick turnaround in assembling a team, organizing an online donation drive, and delivering. When called to action, PHERST and D.C. COA officers stepped up without hesitation to serve and support their local community.

VA Adopts Login.gov For A unified Veteran Sign-In Experience

Reprinted from va.gov

WASHINGTON — By creating an account on Login.gov, Veterans can now use the same login and password to access a growing list of federal government websites, including the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Personnel Management and Small Business Administration to deliver a secure and streamlined identity verification experience.

Currently, Veterans can login to VA.gov, My HealtheVet and VA’s flagship Health and Benefits mobile app using Login.gov.

Operated by the General Services Administration’s Technology Transformation Services, the availability of Login.gov at VA marks a major milestone in improving how Veterans access their benefits and services.

Implementing Login.gov fulfills a key objective of President Biden’s Executive Order on Transforming Federal Customer Experience and VA plays an integral role in innovative technologies driving simplified access to the world-class care and benefits Veterans have earned.

“Login.gov is a secure digital credential designed to streamline how users access government benefits and services,” said Chief Technology Officer Charles Worthington. “As part of the department’s digital transformation efforts focused on continuous improvement, we’re embracing the innovative technology designed by Login.gov to provide our Veterans a seamless sign-in experience to better serve, engage and enhance the customer experience.”

“This is an important example of using technology to deliver services that provide convenient access to benefits while supporting Veterans as they transition into civilian life,” said Director of General Services Administration’s Technology Transformation Services Dave Zvenyach. “It’s our mission at GSA to provide a secure and seamless digital experience for Veterans and those supporting them.”

The launch of Login.gov follows several other digital transformations including the relaunch of VA.gov, and the launch of VA’s flagship mobile application enabling Veterans to schedule and track health care appointments.

To learn more about the sign-in experience visit Login.gov.
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**WHERE**
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**DATE**
Monday, September 19, 2022

**TIME**
Check-in 8:00-8:30 am

**REGISTER**
https://www.phscof.org/golf-tournament/

Questions? CDR David Schwab
Email: dsterp93@yahoo.com.
D.C. COA Volunteers Serve as Scholarship Reviewers for the Arlington Community Foundation

by LCDR Loan Chin and LT Christine Nappa

For the first time ever, Public Health Service (PHS) officers from the District of Columbia (D.C.) branch of the Commissioned Officers Association (COA) served at the annual Arlington Community Foundation (ACF) event as virtual scholarship reviewers in February and March 2022. A total of 11 PHS officers from all categories participated in the virtual scholarship review process. In 2022, ACF volunteers reviewed 310 new applications and awarded new college scholarships totaling nearly $600,000 to 92 new student applicants. In addition, 116 scholarships were given to renewal students. On June 6, 2022, scholarship recipients were celebrated at an in-person awards ceremony and reception at Kenmore Middle School in Arlington, Virginia. Many of the funders and supporters of the scholarships also attended the event where they were able to meet and connect with their scholarship recipient(s) for the first time.

ACF was established in 1991 to serve as a permanent community endowment fostered by the charitable gifts and legacies of individuals, families, and businesses for the advancement of Arlington County, Virginia. ACF awards private scholarship dollars, offers grants to, and manages reserve funds for local nonprofits, and leads programmatic initiatives like the Arlington Youth Philanthropy Initiative, a team of teens who recruit and mentor peers to develop sustainable ventures that positively impact the community.

ACF offers approximately 70 new college scholarships annually, with various criteria for eligibility. Per Natalia Muniz, ACF Program Associate and this year’s scholarship coordinator, the first step in ACF’s evaluation of the students is the community review process, which allows each scholarship application to be read 3-5 times by different community members. The review team includes current and former ACF board members, current and former teachers, past scholarship recipients, and scholarship fundholders. This is where PHS officers stepped in as D.C. COA volunteers to review and score scholarship applications.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, AFC held in-person scholarship reviews at Wakefield High School in Arlington, Virginia. Each scholarship reviewer will roughly score about 20 applicants. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the scholarship review process has gone virtual.

LCDR Chin, lead-officer for the ACF Scholarship Review event, and LT Christine Nappa participated in the event. Below are their experiences.

LT Nappa said “I had the opportunity to serve as a scholarship reviewer this year, along with 10 other PHS officers. I reviewed a total of 19 applications. I found it enjoyable and heartwarming to read the incredible stories of service, life challenges, and accomplishments of Arlington high school students. This felt especially meaningful because of how inspiring the students’ personal statements were and how impactful the scholarship will be for them. It was then fulfilling to see names I recognized from the review process on the list of scholarship recipients. I look forward to volunteering again next year.”

see VOLUNTEERS continued on page 25

Retirement Tax Guide Available

by CAPT Alan Echt (Ret.), Immediate-Past Committee Chair, Legislative Affairs

COA is pleased to announce the release of a new publication exclusively for our members, the Guide to State Income Tax on USPHS Retirement Pay. The Guide is available to COA members behind the member paywall on the COA website. We ask that you not share the copyrighted document with nonmembers.

The 25-page Guide is current through July 2022. The result of painstaking research, it includes information on the income taxes on your retirement pay in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, plus pending legislation. The law in each state is summarized and links to the statutory text and relevant policies and guidelines are included. An appendix includes correspondence between COA and the state revenue authorities where clarification was needed.

We hope the Guide will be a useful reference when you consult with your tax preparer. In addition, it may be a valuable input when you are deciding where to retire. We plan to update the publication annually to reflect new state income tax laws on military retirement pay and interpretations that impact you. If there is sufficient interest, the Guide could potentially be expanded to include information on state income taxes on your active duty pay.

The information in the Guide is provided for informational purposes only. COA does not provide tax advice or representation, and the Guide is not intended as a substitute for advice or services provided by a tax preparer, attorney, accountant, registered agent, or other tax professional. The information contained in this publication is intended to be a service to our members. All the information contained in the Guide was obtained from sources available to the public. All the information in the Guide was current as of July 2022, and all the links therein worked as of July 2022. COA recommends that you consult with a tax professional if you have any questions.
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The U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) and its officers are facing a period of significant change, with the transformation of the USPHS and the Covid-19 Pandemic. What affects officers also affects their service organization, and as a result, the Commissioned Officers’ Association (COA) is also facing a period of significant change. The new Executive Director of COA, Jacqueline Rychnovsky, CAPT, USN (Retired) stepped into her role during this period of change. Rychnovsky shared her perspectives and experiences with leading COA during this turbulent time.

COA is a member-driven service organization and officer feedback informs and has an impact on what decisions are made regarding retention and recruitment. “At COA, officer feedback is especially important. We rely on our annual membership survey to determine what is important to officers on topics which are both large and small. Some examples of items we surveyed members on last year are: reasons for joining; reasons for renewing; length of membership; communication preferences; advocacy priorities; priorities in terms of member benefits; ranked importance of partnership with other Veteran Service Organizations/Military Service Organizations, OSG, CCHQ, OASH, etc., and; symposium attendance and topics of interest,” explained Rychnovsky.

Officer morale in all uniformed services can turn negative during times of significant change. Rychnovsky said to improve morale, “Officers need to feel they are fully being listened to...to be heard. When officers feel they are not being heard, it heightens tension and fosters unhappiness and discontent. Officers then start looking for other career options.” There were two interventions COA used with success. “During the pandemic, when officers could not meet in person, COA began holding events called COA Gatherings, which were quite popular. We also hosted two holiday ‘open mic’ nights and a few other virtual events for newly commissioned officers and Ready Reserve officers. These events were organized with the intent of improving morale and creating a sense of community and fellowship.” Another intervention that helps with morale is managing expectations. “Through open and frequent communication, CCHQ and OSG have been doing a nice job of communicating more frequently, especially the messages over the past year in terms of managing expectations related to promotions. While the news on promotions was not great this go-round, officers seemed much more at peace with the current trends because they knew what to expect,” shared Rychnovsky.
The Department of Veterans Affairs has established a website explaining the details of the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics, or PACT, Act, and encourages veterans to file claims and apply for health care coverage.

The bill, expected to be signed into law Monday by President Joe Biden in a Rose Garden ceremony at the White House, provides health care and disability benefits for certain deployment-related diseases and conditions.

On Tuesday, VA Secretary Denis McDonough encouraged affected veterans, their family members or survivors to apply for benefits by filing a claim.

“Once the President signs this bill into law, we at VA will implement it quickly and effectively, delivering the care these veterans need and the benefits they deserve,” McDonough said in a statement to the press.

The PACT Act was approved by the Senate late Tuesday in an 86-11 vote, the culmination of a months-long congressional effort to bring the legislation across the proverbial finish line. In his State of the Union Address in January, Biden vowed to help veterans with exposure-related illnesses, calling it a “sacred obligation.”

Following Senate approval of the bill, Biden released a statement saying passage was a “decisive and bipartisan win for America’s veterans.”

“For the millions of veterans who may have been exposed to harmful toxins, this bill means quicker access to health care services and other benefits,” Biden said. “This could be the difference between life and death for many suffering from toxic-related illnesses.”

Terri Tanielian, special assistant to the president for veterans affairs, said Wednesday that the bill includes provisions and resources for the VA to process claims more quickly, including an automated system that will expedite claims filed for certain conditions.

Currently, the VA has 595,862 claims filed by veterans that are pending; that includes 164,743 considered backlogged, or pending for more than 125 days.

The PACT Act is expected to add thousands of more claims, from former service members who were diagnosed with one or more of 23 illnesses listed in the new legislation as presumed to be related to airborne toxins. Those will range from Vietnam-era veterans with hypertension to monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance, to veterans exposed to Agent Orange who previously couldn’t file a claim because they were assigned to locations that weren’t identified as having stored or used toxic herbicides.
Standing In Your Own Dignity As A Leader

by LT Mirabelle Adamu, PharmD, MPH

I am LT Mirabelle Adamu, one of the Pharmacists with the Public Health Emergency Response Strike Team (PERST). Prior to commissioning with the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) in 2018, I worked in various public health capacities throughout Africa. It was during one of my assignments in Kenya with Doctors Without Borders that I heard about the USPHS Commissioned Corps.

A PHS officer, who is now retired, spoke with me about the various opportunities with USPHS. The mission and values of the PHS aligned with mine, so I decided to join before aging out. What stood out to me was the focus on leadership because what it means to me, personally. It has been a humbling experience so far to start a career path with no prior military background and learning everything with fresh curiosity. I remember struggling to salute during my OBC class and practicing every evening in front of the mirror until I got it right. My squad teammates were patient and supportive of my struggle and efforts. The encouragement, support, and the zeal to master this most basic skill of an officer was obvious when my squad team was selected as the best in our OBC.

I started my public health career at the Kenya Medical Research Institute/Center for Disease Control and Prevention (KEMRI/ CDC) as the project coordinator for the evaluation of antiretroviral therapy (ART) services in the Nyanza Region. My research helped restructure ART implementation practices and led to significant increases in the region's ART services. My time with the KEMRI and CDC showed me how a coordinated, public health effort can help improve the community. This experience encouraged my next step, pursuing my MPH in Epidemiology.

Armed with my MPH, I served as a field Epidemiologist with Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), a.k.a. Doctors without Borders, tracking a new cholera outbreak in Homa Bay, Kenya in 2015. My cholera work was important, but just like PHS officers, many MSF personnel are privileged to provide field support during periods of great need. I was fortunate to serve as an MSF first responder on two long-term missions: managing pharmacy activities in the Yida Refugee Camp and Nuba Mountains of war-torn South Sudan, and overseeing pharmacy activities for four field projects in Uganda. To ensure continuity of care, I deployed to South Sudan for nine months, and to Uganda for five months. Building health infrastructure and developing programs in such austere environments required tenacity, initiative, and the ability to work under pressure.

Deciding on which category to choose when I commissioned was a difficult decision, as I have always wanted to utilize both pharmacy and public health backgrounds to serve. As I learned the mission of the Corps and saw many officers with dual degrees, I knew that the right opportunity would eventually present itself. In the meantime, I was grateful for the opportunity to serve at Pine Ridge hospital as a Clinical Pharmacist for the past four years.

I have learned that life challenges us constantly to strike a balance between maintaining control and being flexible enough to accommodate new situations. As I progress in my career as a junior officer, I understand that it's easy to navigate life when stronger bonds are built with my coworkers, friends, and family. The challenge for every human being is to find their true inner authority. Authority comes from openness: from an open mind and an open heart. As I stand tall to meet obstacles with dignity and courage, I am gradually digesting the fact that it takes great strength to stand in your own dignity as a leader.

INSIGHTS from page 15
When a service goes through a period of significant change, and morale declines, it can make retention and recruitment difficult for both the service and service organizations. When asked what challenges COA is facing, Rychnovsky replied, “From the perspective of membership, they want to feel appreciated for the work that they do. They enjoy their friendships and the collegiality of collaborating with other officers. They value work-life balance, a positive relationship with a supervisor they respect, fair pay for the work that they do (including specialty pay, hazard pay, etc. as appropriate), the ability to learn and grow in their positions (to include the opportunity to receive leadership training), and the great feeling that comes from making a difference and contributing to the improvement of public health and the health of our nation. From the perspective of COA, I would say balancing the ‘needs of USPHS’ with the needs of the officer.” In terms of what is effective in retention and recruitment, Rychnovsky shared, “Trying to meet individuals where they are at, which speaks to work life balance. Some officers want to deploy or PCS to exciting and exotic locations. Others need to have stability as they grow and nurture their relationships, family, friendships, and community involvement.”
PHS Family & Friends Reunion 5k Run

by LT Samora Casimir, OTR/L

On Saturday July 16th, LCDR Mirabelle Adamu and LT Samora Casimir led the PHS Family & Friends Reunion 5k Run at Bohrer Park in Gaithersburg, MD. These junior officers hosted this 5k run in honor of the birthdate of the U.S. Public Health Service. The 5k began at 10am, right before the DC-COA PHS Family & Friends Reunion Picnic. LT Casimir stated, “we wanted to bring more officers out during the summertime after such a long hiatus of being indoors during the COVID-19 pandemic. We also wanted to collaborate with other PHS Officers in the DMV area and incorporate a physical activity.” A total of 19 participants (10 PHS Officers and 9 civilians) gathered at Bohrer Park to run the 5k and most of the participants stayed for the picnic afterwards. It was a beautiful and fun day in the park but also very hot & humid. The leaders made sure to bring a cooler full of cold water and drinks for the runners to have. We look forward to having more outdoor events to socialize and stay fit.

LT Adamu (left) and LT Casimir (right) pose with the USPHS flag after the 5k.
Navajo Nation recognized with Health Leadership Award for passage of the Air is Life Act of 2021

by Philip J. Carpenter, Executive Director Arizonans Concerned About Smoking, Inc.

On Tuesday May 24, 2022, Health, Education, and Human Services Committee Chairman Honorable Daniel Tso and Resource Development Committee Vice Chairman Honorable Thomas Walker, Jr. both of the 24th Navajo Nation Council received the 2022 Health Leadership Award from Arizonans Concerned About Smoking, Inc. (ACAS) during the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation (COF) for the Advancement of Public Health’s 55th Annual Scientific & Training Symposium.

In October, the Nich’í éí Bee ííná - Air is Life Act of 2021 was unanimously passed by the Navajo Nation Council and signed into law by President Jonathan Nez on November 6, 2021. The new law prohibits the use of commercial tobacco products in enclosed, indoor workplaces or public places, and within 25 feet of any indoor area across the Navajo Nation.

“It’s humbling to know that this was a long and hard effort, but we are thankful as co-sponsors of the resolution. Nich’ íí Bee ííná represents the oxygen we breathe to live every day. We all know the health risks and cancer commercial tobacco brings. We appreciate the Air is Life Coalition, the Navajo Nation Council, and President Jonathan Nez for coming together to get this done. The livelihood of the Navajo people is important and the Air is Life Act protects our future,” said Council Delegate Thomas Walker, Jr. (Birdsprings, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Coalmine Canyon, Cameron).

“The Navajo Nation is concerned for the health of our young people, especially when e-cigarettes and vaping are becoming easier to access. The long, hard lobbying efforts of the Air is Life Coalition and the perseverance of Dr. Patricia Nez-Henderson must be commended. It is an honor to sponsor this historic legislation that will save countless lives. We proudly accept this Health Leadership Award and thank Arizonans Concerned About Smoking Inc. for their hard work educating the public on the dangers of tobacco smoking,” said Chairman Daniel Tso (Littlewater, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake, Baca/ Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Ojo Encino, Counselor). ACAS also commended Jackson State University with a 2022 Health Leadership Award, for their 100% Tobacco-Free Campus Policy including prohibiting E-Cigarettes. Their policy also includes non-combustibles. Jackson State University’s policy was approved on 10.26.21. Their policy is a role-model policy. Jackson State University joined forces with Truth Initiative - the national non-profit dedicated to achieving a culture where young people reject smoking, vaping and nicotine - to adopt a 100% tobacco/vape-free campus policy.

In 2015 Truth Initiative along with CVS Health Foundation convened 33 Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) at Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina who are the first to participate in its Tobacco-Free HBCU Campus initiative. 18th U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Regina Benjamin led this effort. The initiative helps HBCUs establish comprehensive smoke and tobacco-free policies on their campuses.

Jackson State University is one of 10 HBCUs or Predominantly Black Institutions (PBIs) to receive this Truth Initiative award as part of a national movement among students, faculty, and administrators to address smoking, vaping, and nicotine use at college campuses throughout the U.S. since 2015. Truth Initiative’s Tobacco/Vape-Free College Program has awarded more than $2.5 million in funding to 205 community colleges, women’s colleges, college systems, and minority-serving institutions including 59 HBCUs and 8 PBIs. With 99% of smokers initiating tobacco use before their 26th birthday, college campuses are critical in helping young people learn the facts about e-cigarettes and tobacco so that they can live healthier lives. Jackson State University joins hundreds of institutions that are working to protect a combined 1.9 million students and 161,000 employees in 40 states.

ACAS is a non-profit, pro-health organization that seeks to raise public awareness regarding the hazards of tobacco use. The organization believes that all individuals should have a healthy smoke-free workplace and home and not be exposed to second-hand smoke.

The ACAS annual event is dedicated to the work of U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps officers. Additionally, many of the nation’s top federal, tribal, and state public health providers, administrators, and emergency responders received recognition for their hard work in the field of public health during the pandemic.
CALL FOR APPLICATIONS: BARCLAY-GIEL SEED GRANTS

ELIGIBILITY
Any 501c3 non-profit or local/state/tribe/tribal organization with a focus on public health. Grants will be open to all areas of public health, with the Surgeon General’s Priorities of special interest. These include topics related to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Health misinformation
- Health worker burnout
- Youth mental health

DEADLINE
The application period will be SEPTEMBER 8 – NOVEMBER 3, 2022. Award recipients will be announced in February 2023. Maximum grant amount is $10,000 per award granted.

FUNDED BY
The grants are funded by the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation (COF) for the Advancement of Public Health and are named after the late Martha Barclay-Giel, retired captain of the U.S. Public Health Service.

APPLY
Find more information at PHSCOFOG/SEED-GRANTS.HTML
USPHS Commissioned Corps and the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College

by LT Cindy H. Pallack, MS, MPS, RDH

The United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps has a unique training opportunity that many officers may not be aware of. In 2020, we sent our first Public Health Service officer to the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) at Fort Belvoir, VA. The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH) established a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the CGSC. Since then, close to 20 Public Health Service officers have completed this course.

This 14-week leadership course teaches officers to develop focused solutions to today’s problems and challenges using the Military Decision Making Process (MDMP). The goal is to teach officers how to align the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy, and the National Military Strategy with current strategic priorities.

The Common Core includes ten courses, including a final comprehensive assessment and the oral board exam.

This training is highly recommended for U.S. Army officers at the O-3/O-4 level to transition them from a tactical-level to an operational-level perspective. This leadership course is considered an Intermediate Service College professional education (18 credits), often the last formal Army education for most officers. It is structured like a graduate level certificate program.

I attended this course from January to April of this year as the first USPHS dental hygienist. This is indeed a unique experience. I engaged with my classmates (the majority were U.S. Army majors) through practical exercises, debates, and other activities. There is significant after-class individual preparation, so no regular job duties can be completed. Written and oral assignments become a daily routine. Active participation in all classes (40% of your grade in most classes) and individual contribution (group projects) are a must to be successful. At the end of this course, officers undergo a one-hour oral board examination conducted by a panel of three faculty members. The oral board is designed to test officers’ knowledge of the core curriculum and their ability to apply the concepts, frameworks, and theories concerning national security. Officers receive extensive critique on all written assignments and oral presentations. This constructive feedback will help to develop more self-aware leaders. It forces officers to think fast on their feet and tests their mental agility. Yes, officers will be outside their comfort zone, but in the end, it will make them better officers who can think critically, make better decisions, and communicate more effectively, especially in joint operations with our sister services. The course is designed as a broad-based education regardless of branch, functional area, or specialty; therefore, it does not matter whether you are a physician, a social worker, or a dental hygienist. This graduate-level educational program is built on a foundation of critical thinking skills. This will not only benefit you as an officer, but your agency will benefit from this as well. It improves your overall knowledge and skills that are required to be a leader, no matter what your specialty is or which agency you work for and, therefore, improves your performance by working more effectively and efficiently. You will become more proactive rather than reactive, which will make you a valuable team member anywhere.

While this course is heavily U.S. Army-focused, it still relates to us, the USPHS Commissioned Corps. We will be more involved in joint operations, whether it is through deployments or other training opportunities. Public Health Service officers will be able to engage with other service members actively and contribute on an entirely different level. Additionally, we will be able to understand the DoD’s language. The U.S. Army has an acronym for everything, so imagine a Public Health Service officer is detailed to the DoD, deployed with the DoD (as we have seen with COVID-19), or attending IRTs with our sister services; Public Health Service officers will understand their systems and processes a bit better. This is an excellent course that will challenge us, but it is a unique way for us to get involved with the other uniformed services to raise awareness about who we are and our significant role in future joint operations.

This course is offered three times a year. Commissioned Corps Headquarters announces this training opportunity, and you can apply via the Commissioned Corps Learning Management System (CCLMS) on CCMIS where you can find all the necessary information about the course.
The PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF) recently provided $16,000 in scholarships to high school seniors, undergraduate, and graduate students who are sponsored by a member of the Commissioned Officers Association of the USPHS (COA). Scholarships are made possible by generous donations from active duty and retired USPHS members, local COA branches, and others.

Scholarship recipients are selected based on academic excellence, career aspirations, and extracurricular school and community activities.

The 2022 recipients are:

- **Abigail Post**: Exercise Physiology, Marquette University (CAPT Jennifer Post)
- **Addison Ault**: Exercise Science, Montana State University (CDR Gregory Ault)
- **Alexa Mutz**: Cell and Molecular Biology, Northeastern State University (CDR Shelo Mutz) *
- **Amelia Thoennes**: Microbiology and Biotechnology, South Dakota State University (CDR Mary Thoennes)
- **Carla Merriweather**: Nursing, Howard University (CAPT Sheila Pack Merriweather)
- **Carolyn Fenno**: Biology, Pierce College Fort Steliacoom (CDR James Fenno)
- **Colin McGarry**: Biomedical Engineering, Regis College (CDR Mary McGarry)
- **Katherine Gora Combs**: Epidemiology, University of North Carolina (CAPT Jeffery Combs)
- **Landon Lee**: Biology, William Jewell College (CAPT Michael Lee)
- **Laurel Gibbins**: Medical Laboratory Science, University of Cincinnati (CAPT John Gibbins)
- **Lily Richardson**: English, Arizona State University (CAPT Jeffrey Richardson)
- **Miguel Verani**: Economics, Washington University (CAPT Jennifer Verani)
- **Nam Phuong Pommier**: Nutrition and Dietetics, Rowan University (LCDR Ryan Pommier)
- **Paige Reed**: Biology, University of Maryland (LCDR Jennifer Shepherd)
- **Rebecca Cox**: Medicine, Emory University (CDR Deborah Cox)

*Alexa Mutz also received the Ronald Lessing Scholarship. Ronald Lessing, DBA, MS, had a lifelong devotion to learning and teaching in science and mathematics. He served as a full-time Public Health Service civilian employee of various agencies within the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and received numerous honors and awards for outstanding performance. A devoted husband and father, Ronald Lessing tragically succumbed to a malignant disease on April 7, 1976, leaving a wife and three young sons. This award was established by his family to honor his legacy.

More information about the COF Family Member Scholarships can be found at: [https://www.phscof.org/scholarships/family-member-scholarships/](https://www.phscof.org/scholarships/family-member-scholarships/)

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The Role of Ancestors in Spirituality

Asking for spiritual guidance is a healthy way to grow spiritually. There are different ways to do this such as prayer or seeking pastoral counseling. Another way is to seek guidance from one’s ancestors.

Ancestor worship can be defined as a religious practice that is based on the belief that deceased family members continue to exist and can impact the lives of the living. This practice is also cultural and practiced in many belief systems world-wide. You may be familiar with the Day of the Dead (Día de Los Muertos) from Mexico. During this celebration unique symbols and offerings are made to ancestors to help them pass through the afterlife. In Chinese folk religion, a shi will impersonate the deceased ancestor and act on their behalf at the funeral or worship event. The veneration of the saints in the Catholic and Christian belief system is another form of ancestral worship. Some even consider the Memorial Day holiday a form of ancestral worship.

So, what does this mean for us spiritually? Whether you ask for help through prayer, spiritual counseling, or ancestral worship, it is healthy to know your roots and seek to incorporate that wisdom into your daily life. Sometimes there are wounds in our ancestral past that need to be healed. Sometimes there are both positive and negative spiritual characteristics of our ancestors which need to be reinstated, taught to the next generation, or improved in our present spiritual practices. When we reflect on and look to those who came before us, and the lessons that they taught us, we show gratitude, humility, love, and respect. Practicing these values daily helps us to keep a healthy perspective on life.

I think that we could loosely apply this concept to how we view our retired PHS officers. I’m not saying that we should make them all shrines, but we should show appreciation for who they are and the role that they filled in our past. Retired officers should be valued for their contributions to our Corps, the nation, and as individuals.

May we always show gratitude, humility, love, and respect for those who have gone before us.

Education: Pchum Ben

A Buddhist holiday from Cambodia which is also known as Ancestors Day. Each family creates offerings for 15 days each year while monks chant continuously and perform ancestral worship ceremonies. This is to honor ancestors as far back as 7 generations.

Spiritual Exercises

1. Internet search: https://www.joincake.com/blog/ancestor-worship/
2. Read The Ancestors Within: Discover and Connect With Your Ancient Origins by Amy Gillespie Dougherty.
3. Watch a documentary called: Confucianism is Making a Comeback in China
4. Take a graduate course in ancestor worship practices to re-connect and grow.

Questions? Comments? Contact me at khredman@hotmail.com.
For two full weeks in April 2022, CDR Alexander Varga had the distinct honor of attending the Interagency Institute for Federal Health Leaders (IAI), and proudly represented the United States Public Health Service (USPHS). This training was geared toward health leaders who have been selected by flag officers or chief professional officers to represent their respective agencies and who are on the cusp of attaining critical leadership roles at major federal health institutions. About 35 officers from the USPHS, Army, Navy, and Air Force, and four civilians representing the Veteran’s Health Administration were in attendance. Of the officer pool, there were seven O-5 officers from the services and the remaining 28 officers were O-6 captains or colonels. Suffice it to say, the attendees had entire careers worth of healthcare experience and this course acted as a beacon for greater duties and responsibilities to come.

The purpose of the IAI was to provide an opportunity for seasoned, practicing federal health care executives to examine some of the current issues in health care policy and management and to explore their potential impact on the federal health care system. This was accomplished by describing how political, policy, economic, and management trends impact health care and population health. It explored how to apply this knowledge in future planning by evaluating actions and activities that should be addressed to promote excellence in patient care and health promotion. Additionally, concepts of teamwork, evidence-based practice, application of information technology, outcomes-oriented performance improvement, and responsible leadership were all motifs throughout the course that were explored at both the individual and service levels.

CDR Varga stated, “Like so many conferences that I have attended, the connections made between fellow classmates and students are often more important than the material covered. The students at IAI represent some of the best their services have to offer, and it was invigorating and humbling to interact with officers of such caliber. I wholeheartedly recommend this course, as it was one of the most formative and inspiring courses I have taken in my uniformed service career.”

CDR Katie Jacques and LCDR Christopher Chong were honored to attend an abbreviated version of IAI at the 2022 COF Scientific and Training Symposium in Phoenix, Arizona. The presenters included Dr. Richard Southby, Dr. Josef Reum, Lt. Gen (Ret) Jay Silveria, Dr. Boris Lushniak, and RADM David Goldman. The agenda included: Information on IAI; Learning as Leadership; Lessons in Leadership from Leading People for 20 Years; The Climb Towards Leadership; Lessons on Leadership from an Academic Perspective; and Leading into the Future.

CDR Jacques was excited to get a sneak peek into the full course at the pre-conference and took home some gold nuggets of information to apply as a leader. One takeaway was shared by Dr. Lushniak. He shared the 4 D’s of leadership which were: Decide; Delegate; Disappear; and Do and Deliver. Dr. Lushniak reminded the audience about servant leadership - that the main goal of the leader is to serve - and the focus should be to help the people within the organization thrive.

LCDR Chong appreciated the different perspectives of each panel member, as they shared their experiences and wisdom regarding leadership. He was particularly interested in Lt. Gen. Jay Silveria, a retired US Air Force officer, who shared his perspective on leading large organizations. He challenged the attendees to consider the following four points:

1) Take responsibility for things you do know do not exist.
2) Leaders need to communicate clearly and be mindful of the audience.
3) Establishing culture early on is paramount for the leader.
4) Leaders need to own mistakes, rise to challenges, and continuously learn and adjust.

CDR Jacques stated, “As officers, we are all leaders. We all should continue to strive to learn how to always grow. Remember to build rapport with your teams, encourage collaboration, be positive, remember the big picture, set a high ethical standard.”

LCDR Chong stated “The pre-conference training provided many valuable lessons and questions for leaders to consider. What stood out the most was the emphasis on building connections and positive relationships with subordinates and superiors.”

In summary, all three officers highly recommend seeking this course and other leadership growth opportunities. Thank you to the Commissioned Officers Association for partnering with IAI to provide the pre-conference opportunity. Also, thank you to the IAI team for sharing your experiences and knowledge with us.
CAPT (ret) Paul O Fehnel, Jr, USPHS

Paul O Fehnel, Jr. CAPT, USPHS (ret) passed away peacefully on January 22, 2022. He grew up in Lansdale, PA and graduated from Temple University, School of Pharmacy. He joined the United States Public Health Service and as a commissioned officer was stationed at the National Institutes of Health, Division of Biologic Standards. He received a law degree in 1965 from George Washington University, School of Law. He was transferred to the Food & Drug Administration and remained there until his retirement in 1986.

In retirement, he enjoyed traveling with his wife and spending time with his 3 daughters and 7 grandchildren. Family was a very important part of his life.

He is survived by his wife of 63 years, Audrey, his daughters, Paula Moore (Scott), Kathy Goldberg (Charles) and Carolyn Lass (William) and 7 grandchildren, Melanie Moore, Andrew Moore, Stephen Goldberg, Christopher Goldberg, Matthew Goldberg, Daniel Lass, and Sarah Lass.

A private service is scheduled. In lieu of flowers, please send donations to the Alzheimer's Association.

Life member CAPT (Ret.) Virginia Saba, USPHS

Virginia K. Saba, EdD, DS, RN, FAAN, FACMI, a nursing informatics pioneer, died on November 20, 2021, after a brief illness. Saba started her journey in the field of informatics as coding supervisor of a National Institutes of Health (NIH) study on the perinatal experiences of 50,000 pregnant women. Her early work laid the foundation for her mission to ensure that nursing data could be used to make nursing care visible—an interest that inspired her to earn a master’s degree in computer science and a doctoral degree in the science of technology management information from American University in Washington, DC.

Over more than four decades, Saba made significant contributions to developing the discipline of nursing informatics. Notably, she developed the Clinical Care Classification (CCC) System, a nursing terminology and coding system that facilitated the documentation of nursing plans of care. She was instrumental in establishing many conferences and events, including a major NIH conference on computers and nursing and the first nursing sessions at the Fifth Annual Symposium on Computer Applications in Medical Care (SCAMC), both in 1981. She also helped form the first SCAMC special interest group for nurses in 1981, now known as the American Medical Informatics Association Nursing Informatics Special Interest Group, which she chaired from 2001 to 2004, and the first Council on Computer Applications in Nursing at the American Nurses Association in 1986. Prior to her death, Saba was chief executive officer and president of SabaCare Inc.—Diane J. Skiba, PhD, FACMI, ANEF, FAAN

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LCDR Chin stated “As a former AFC scholarship recipient myself, I know first-hand how much of an impact these scholarships provide to local students. I will always feel a debt of gratitude to my benefactors Ernest and Virginia Carl, and to the AFC volunteer team. Serving as a reviewer is my way of giving back and connecting with each new class of students – their stories are always enjoyable to read and truly inspirational.”

If you are interested in serving as a scholarship reviewer, be on the lookout for an email blast from D.C. COA calling for volunteers in early 2023.

If you know any Arlington high school students in need of scholarships for college, the 2022-2023 scholarship application window is open through February 4, 2023. Find more information about ACF scholarships here: https://www.arlcf.org/scholarships/

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Without a doubt, everything on that list is important. But there is so much more that happens at the USPHS OBC, which shares similarities with the Navy’s Officer Development School (ODS), the Air Force’s Commissioned Officer Training (COT), and the Army’s Basic Officer Leader Course (BOLC). OBC is where officers first become comfortable wearing the uniform and feel free to make mistakes that will be gently corrected by seasoned leaders. Officers begin to understand the importance of teamwork, discipline, and standardization. Cooperation, and focusing on the good of the group instead of the individual, is paramount. The ability to resolve conflict and establish healthy working relationships are vital to being a successful commissioned officer. At the end of training, officers receive their first ribbon, one you never forget.

What do I remember about my indoctrination course in April 1990, back when the Navy called it Officer Indoctrination School (OIS)? I remember physical training starting at 5 a.m. on a mat in the gym, the warm water of the indoor pool where I learned to make a life preserver out of my pants, and the frigid bay water as I completed damage control training on the USS Buttercup. I remember going to “Sick Call” for ankle pain, being unaccustomed to the level of exercise experienced by countless new officers. I will never forget being yelled at for walking across the grass while in uniform and being barked at to get “in step” during Pass-in-Review practice. Those were the days!

Spring arrives late to Newport, Rhode Island, so our class was small, as many opt to attend in the summer months where it is easier to blend in with a large class. A small class meant standing the “watch” every third night, oftentimes at zero-dark-thirty. I remember having a roommate even though there were plenty of vacant rooms down the hall. I remember having to make and take phone calls from a pay phone in the hallway.

What I remember the most are the incredible and lifelong relationships forged during the 6-week course. We were all in it together and had the common goal of graduation so we could do important things for humankind. I remember the late-night study groups, the laughs, the tears, and finally understanding what it means to call someone a shipmate.

While attending the OBC Open House on July 20th I had the pleasure of meeting twenty-three bright, energetic, and excited future public health leaders. Eighteen of the 23 joined COA during the Open House, making our association even stronger. We hope the other five decide to take us up on the first-year complimentary membership in COA.

What do you remember about your OBC course? Was it required when you were on active duty? How has it changed over the years? I would love to hear your stories and share them in a future edition of Frontline. Drop me a line anytime at jrychnovsky@coausphs.org.

Until next time!
PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation
Donations Received, July 1, 2022 to July 31, 2022

**Platinum ($1,000+)**
- CAPT Amy Barkin
- LT Mirabelle Adamu*
- RADM Van Hubbard*
- CDR Dyanne Medina-Jarrin*
- RADM Sven Rodenbeck*
- CDR Kelly Valente*
- Mr. George Wildeboor

**Gold ($500)**
- RADM Randall Gardner*
- CAPT Thomas Tarpley

**Silver ($250)**
- CAPT Dale Lawrence*

**Bronze ($100)**
- CAPT Elizabeth Clark*
- CDR Mateusz Karwowski*
- CAPT James Keene*
- CDR Kristie Purdy*
- CAPT Betty Rufus*
- CAPT Rita Shapiro*
- CAPT Richard Smith*
- CAPT Richard Smith
- CAPT Geswaldo Verrone*

**Friends (Under $100)**
- RADM Audrey Nora*
- CAPT Mark Anderson
- CAPT Janet Jones*
- LT Leonidra Taty*
- LTJG Somtochukwu Urme-Ugwa*
- Mrs. Carol Dellapenna

* PBS Documentary Donations
All other donations were made to the COF General Fund

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**We Welcome New Members of COA, July 1 - July 31, 2022**

- LCDR Stephen Berry VA
- Dr. Edward Amores NJ
- LT Kawana Cohen-Hopkins MD
- LT Kelly Chapman GA
- LT Brittany Shapiro Dooley MD
- LTJG Rahat Chowdhury NY
- ENS Maura Mzozayana OH
- ENS Annabelle Bailey MD
- LT Sylvia May VA
- LT Jenna Lewis TX
- LT Heidy Perales CA
- Dr. Paul Kilgore MI

- Dr. Sarah Lister DC
- LTJG John Schimmelfing NC
- LCDR Chris Chestnut AK
- LCDR Blake Donaldson CT
- LT Jessilyn Dunegan AK
- LT Andrew Benford NC
- LT Derek Lieser OK
- LT Claudia Fongwen MD
- LCDR Kenneth Faubel CA
- LT Yaritbel Torres-Mendoza VA
- LT De-An Watkins GA
- LT LaShawn Williams AZ
- LT Tiffany Purdie NC

- LTJG Marilyn Wolff GA
- LTJG Sarah Beale NC
- LT Conner Mann OK
- Dr. Lilanthi Balasuriya GA
- LT Stephanie Rimroth FL
- LT Johnna Tunnyhill WA
- LT Vanessa Davies CA
- LT Jasmine Agostino MD
- LT Mike Buck Elk NM
- LT Enid Velez-Valle HI
- LCDR Lynne White-Shim IL
- LT Grace Vixama OH

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**Donation Levels**

- Leadership Society. . . . $10,000
- President’s Society. . . . $5,000
- Founder’s Society. . . . $2,500
- Platinum. . . . . . . . . $1,000
- Gold. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . $500
- Silver. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . $250
- Bronze. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . $100

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