

Rocky Mount RAM Event



United States Public Health Service officers across three states volunteering at the Remote Area Medical (RAM) event in Rocky Mount, North Carolina

by CDR Katherine Demers, DMSc, PA-C, CAQ-PSYCH and CDR Marion Collins, LCSW/BCD/ACSW

On September 5, 2023, Commissioned Corps Headquarters (CCHQ) issued a solicitation for volunteers to engage in an ongoing collaborative initiative with Remote Area Medical (RAM). With the support, guidance, and coordination of CCHQ's Readiness and Deployment Branch (RDB) and the Preparedness and Exercise Program Manager, CDR Jill Gelviro, six RAM training events were approved for Fiscal Year 2024. The objectives: to provide preparedness training to USPHS officers in leadership, officership, and essential deployment/clinical skills while providing no-cost dental, vision, medical, and health

education services to individuals confronting the challenges of uninsurance and underservice.

Subsequently, on the afternoon of October 13, 2023, a contingent of 22 United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps officers spanning three states and five professional categories convened with RAM coordinators at Nash Central High School in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. Under the leadership of CDR Jill Gelviro (USPHS-RAM Executive Officer), LCDR Stephanie Avent (Officer in Charge (OIC)), and LCDR Daveta Bailey (Deputy OIC), the collective discerned the medical void present in the North Carolina region and

see **ROCKY MOUNT** on page 17

from the
Executive
Director



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

A Day in the Life of the COA Executive Director

Every now and again the Executive Director is asked what a typical workday is like. Each day is different, but rarely are days boring, routine, or mundane. Better words to describe most days are exciting, interesting, encouraging, and lively. The word frustrating comes into play when we are lobbying Congress since things are moving at a snail's pace.

In late September I jotted down notes from a particularly diverse day, with a plan to write this column. Other topics took precedence for the October and November columns so I will share the events of this late September day with you now.

The morning began at 7:30, as it always does, with a thorough reading of the Washington Post, cover to cover. I look for about anything that relates to the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, from national news and trends to local news, obituaries, feature articles, editorials, and Letters to the Editor.

see **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR** on page 18

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

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Insurance Programs

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Board of Directors

Season's Greetings



The View of Alaska at Eagle River Nature Center

by CDR Katie Jacques, Chair-Elect, COA Board of Directors

Wait for it...Don't do it...Blink. And just like that another calendar year has come and gone. This time of year, in Alaska, we get an environmental reminder to celebrate the pause. Embrace the darkness. Find the beauty in the gray.

Before I moved to Alaska, solstice was just another day on the calendar to me. A day where we get shifts in daylight and a change in season. But now, I celebrate the solstice. On the shortest day of the year, December 21st, Southcentral Alaska's total daylight is five hours and 28 minutes. In Barrow, Alaska, 330 miles north of the Arctic Circle, there are 67 consecutive days of darkness. My family celebrates December 21st by spending it together outside. The darkness drives some people insane, but for others, it opens a gateway into wonder and peace.

This has become our seasonal family tradition, to explore that gateway into wonder and peace together.

Take a moment to enjoy a pause and think about what your favorite holiday tradition is. There are many traditions that are shared amongst families, such as going to get your Christmas tree the weekend after Thanksgiving. As the year ends, it is always good to reflect on our accomplishments. I'd like to take a moment to highlight some of COAs 2023 accomplishments:

- Advocated for baggage fees to be waived for USPHS offers on United, Spirit, Southwest, and Allegiant Airlines.
- Supported the USPHS Commissioned Corps introduce their first ever service mascot, LCDR Abigail.

see **BOARD** continued on page 7



Greater Los Angeles COA Represents the Commissioned Corps at Career Event at Tustin Unified School District

by LT Olubukola Banmeke, Ph.D. and LT Claire Tipton, Greater Los Angeles COA President

On November 1st, 2023, the Greater Los Angeles COA Branch participated in the "Pathway to Success" career event organized by Tustin Unified School District in Orange County, CA, for middle and high school students in the district. The event was a success, with over 300 students and their families in attendance. Greater Los Angeles COA members spent the evening engaging with students, educating families on the USPHS Commissioned Corps, and sharing resources on how to join via student programs, such as JRCOSTEP and SRCOSTEP. LT Jamie Williams (Secretary) and LT Olubukola Banmeke (Treasurer) presented at two panel sessions covering "Finding Meaning in the Military: Careers and Opportunities." Four uniformed services were represented in the panel, including the United States Public Health Service. In addition, Greater Los Angeles COA members including LCDR Sydney Tran served at a USPHS exhibition table. The table was visited by students, parents, guardians, teachers, and other uniformed service members. Overall, the event was a success, with Greater Los Angeles COA answering the call to recruit, engage, and share the incredible opportunity to serve our nation through the USPHS Commissioned Corps with the next generation.



Greater Los Angeles COA at the USPHS exhibition table. (Left to Right)- LCDR Sydney Tran, LT Jamie Williams, LT Olubukola Banmeke.

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Ending the Year with Praise: Reflecting on Achievements and Gratitude

by LT Lucy Efobi, DNP, MBA-C, APN, FNP-BC, AAHIVS

As we approach the conclusion of another eventful year, it is both fitting and essential to take a moment for reflection and express gratitude for the journey we've navigated. "Ending the Year with Praise" encapsulates not just a celebration of accomplishments but a recognition of the collective efforts that have shaped the past 12 months. As United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Officers, we strive for excellence, even in the face of difficulty. We fight, even when we had nothing left in us... through it all, we succeed!

Reflecting on Achievements

The end of the year provides a natural pause for reflection, allowing us to assess the goals we set at the beginning of the year and acknowledge the strides we've made. Whether in our personal or professional lives, celebrating achievements, big or small, contributes to a positive mindset and fuels motivation for the future.

Take a moment to consider the challenges you've overcome, the milestones you've reached, and the personal growth you've experienced. Acknowledge the efforts that have propelled you forward and the lessons learned from setbacks. Each accomplishment, no matter how minor, is a testament to resilience and determination.

Expressing Gratitude

Gratitude is a powerful force that can transform our outlook on life. As we

approach the year's end, expressing gratitude becomes an integral part of the process. Consider the individuals who have supported you—colleagues, friends, family, mentors, or even chance encounters that left a positive impact.

Take the time to convey your appreciation to those who have been instrumental in your journey. A simple note, a heartfelt conversation, or a small gesture can go a long way in fostering meaningful connections. Gratitude not only enriches your relationships but also cultivates a positive and collaborative environment.

Celebrating Team Success

As commissioned officers, we are a team. For many, the workplace is a significant arena for growth and achievement. Ending the year with praise in a professional context involves recognizing the collective efforts of a team. Celebrate the accomplishments of your colleagues and acknowledge the collaborative spirit that propels your organization forward.

Consider organizing a team appreciation event or expressing your gratitude in a team meeting. Recognizing and celebrating collective successes fosters a sense of camaraderie, boosting morale and setting a positive tone for the upcoming year.

Looking Ahead with Optimism

While reflecting on the year's achievements and expressing gratitude, it's equally important to look ahead with optimism. The end of the year is not just a conclusion but a transition—a



LT Lucy Efobi, DNP, MBA-C, APN, FNP-BC, AAHIVS

moment to set new goals, embrace fresh opportunities, and continue the journey of growth.

As we conclude this chapter, let us carry forward the lessons learned, the accomplishments celebrated, and the gratitude expressed. "Ending the Year with Praise" is not just a retrospective exercise but a forward-looking affirmation of our ability to navigate challenges, celebrate victories, and embrace the endless possibilities that lie ahead.

In closing, let's savor the moments, express our gratitude, and step into the new year with hearts full of optimism and minds brimming with the potential for greatness.

Greater Los Angeles USPHS Officers Serving People Experiencing Homelessness

by LT Jamie Williams, BSN, RN and LT Alberto Pina, MPH

Los Angeles is a city renowned for glamour and opulence. Unfortunately, this also means that it's easy to overlook the stark reality of homelessness that affects over 41,000 individuals in the city. The Midnight Mission, situated at the heart of Skid Row, is dedicated to addressing this crisis by providing comprehensive services like education, mental health, and child development. However, the most pressing and consistent need is for food services. With an average of 1,000 meals per service, volunteers play a crucial role in meeting this need.

On November 4, 2023, the Greater Los Angeles COA Branch collaborated with The Midnight Mission to address the immediate need for meals. Five officers and one family member volunteered to support meal preparation and lunch service, serving approximately 1,000 meals to residents, families, and people experiencing homelessness. The officers' dedication extended beyond lunch, as they also assisted with cleaning and dishwashing to prepare for dinner service. This level of commitment to community service reflects positively on the USPHS Commission Corps and serves as an excellent example of how we can make a difference in the lives of those in need.

A heartfelt thank you to all the officers whose volunteer efforts went above and beyond. This collaboration serves as a reminder of the impactful outcomes achievable through community engagement and interorganizational effort to address homelessness.



Front Row: Amanda Dudley (Spouse), CDR Michelle Sandoval-Rosario, LT Olubukola Banmike, LT Jamie Williams. Back Row: LT Julian Dudley, LT Alberto Pina

Preparing for the Death of a Loved One

by CAPT (Ret) Carl J Chancey, RPh., MPH

I am writing this story post the November 08, 2023, COA and National Cemetery Administration videoconference on tips on how to plan for a burial at a national cemetery. The Veterans Administration reports that only 20% of eligible veterans have taken advantage of burial at a national cemetery. Burial at a national cemetery is an earned benefit for all those who have honorably served our nation. USPHS officers and their spouses are eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery. Preplanning is important because someday you or your spouse will be faced with the inevitable as I was on July 15, 2022.

My wife and I did pre-need contracts with the funeral home of our choice. Each contract included the type of religious

ceremony and color guard to be present at our respective burials. It is the funeral home's responsibility to advise the VA national cemetery of your wishes, and to arrange for the religious ceremony and color guard. The VA national cemetery can assist in making these respective arrangements.

My wife's wishes were to be cremated and her remains placed with mine if I preceded her death. My wishes were to be buried in a casket and my wife's remains placed with mine. Because of our two different wishes and wanting to be together for eternity, we decided to investigate the VA burial locations in Massachusetts and chose the Massachusetts National Cemetery in Bourne, MA. It is truly a beautiful, well maintained, and peaceful resting place. MA State Veterans Cemeteries were not

an option because USPHS officers are not yet defined as veterans under MA General Laws.

I contacted the administration office at the MA National Cemetery and explained our final wishes to be buried together there. The representative I spoke with was professional, knowledgeable, understanding, and helpful. I was advised that when either I or my wife passed away, the survivor would need to call and speak with a representative at the National Cemetery Scheduling Office (800-535-1117), provide military discharge documentation, and once verified a unique VA ID number is issued which is to be provided to the MA National Cemetery for scheduling a burial. It is therefore important before calling to make certain that DEERS

see **LOVED ONE** on page 12



The Work of COF: Board of Trustees December 2023 Meeting – a Behind-the-Scenes Look”

Dear Officers and Friends of COF and COA: Happy Holidays to each of you and your families and friends. The month of December is always a special time of the year filled with joy and togetherness with loved ones. May your holidays be filled with much health and happiness!

I wanted to share with you all a “short” behind-the-scenes look at the business of COF from our December 2023 meeting. We had updates on the following: (1) Jim Knoben’s book titled, *Pandemics, Politics, and Public Health* which will be ready for publication early 2024 – Jim has worked on this historical book for over four years and it will be a great book for your library; (2) our plans to revise COF’s strategic plan 2024 – 2028 starting in January; end of year donation letter (please continue to support COF and the work of our officers); and, (3) Seed grants for communities that we support (139 applications received that the committee will review in mid-January). Our Treasurer, Karen Watkins, provided the treasurer’s report with a review of financials and made a call for 2024-2025 budget requests. RDML (Ret.)

Steve Solomon, past President, briefed the Board on two committees that he is supporting – (1) Resource Development Committee and our work to grow the resource base of COF with a review of future initiatives; and, (2) Invisible Corps Ad Hoc Committee - we are trying to get as much visibility on the documentary as possible. RDML (Ret.) Sven Rodenbeck, who serves as the Senior Advisor to COF for the 2024 USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium, provided an update on the planning efforts with a special discussion on the reimagined Anchor and Caduceus Gala (this event will be fun-filled!)

We also had a recap of the screenings of *Invisible Corps: In Officio Salutis* in the Washington, DC metro area that took place in October 2023. At one of our final screenings, held at the George Washington University, Milken Institute School of Public Health, many of the COF Board of Trustees in attendance presented Ali MacGraw, the documentary narrator, with a token of our appreciation for her narration of the documentary,

which she provided to us for gratis. Ali MacGraw, a Golden Globe recipient and an Academy Award nominee, has embraced the work of the USPHS Commissioned Corps and had spoken at many of our screenings – sent me a thank note. I want to share with you some of her words to us...

“I cannot thank you enough for your graciousness and kindness to me during the wonderful events for the “Invisible Corps.” I am so grateful and blessed to have had the opportunity to narrate Chris Schuler’s superb film about the remarkable group of men and women who give so enormously to all of us. It was a joy and a privilege to meet so many officers – men and women whose lives are all about helping others, and you were so unbelievably generous to present me with the beautiful crystal “award” – the very treasured medal. I was completely stunned and overwhelmed and honored by all of you and I thank you and all of your extraordinary officers for every moment of that time with you all. Ali”

Happy Holidays!

Exciting Career Fair Day at Texas Southern University (TSU)

by LCDR Ubong Akpan, PharmD, RN, BCPS; LCDR Elise Ngameni, BSN, MSN, FNP-BC, LT Folarin Ojowa, PharmD, CCHP; and LT Vera Bijingsi, PharmD

On November 3, 2023, under the umbrella of the Black Commissioned Officers Advisory Group (BCOAG), four officers from different United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps categories, led by LCDR Ubong Akpan, attended his alma mater's, Texas Southern University College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences (TSUCOPHS), Career Fair. Located in Houston, TX, TSU is one of the nation's largest Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). The fair provided outreach and vital recruitment information to students of the College pursuing different career pathways including Pharmacy, Nutrition and Dietetics, Environmental Health, Clinical Laboratory Science, Respiratory Therapy, Healthcare Administration, and Health Information Management. The event was attended by 11 agencies and employers of labor including hospitals and big pharmacy chains.

The students were excited to learn about career opportunities in the USPHS Commissioned Corps and especially the JRCOSTEP and SRCOSTEP as they considered these to be appealing opportunities prior to graduation. The section assigned to the USPHS Commissioned Corps experienced the highest traffic amongst the 11 different agencies present. The students were very engaged as most of them were unaware of our service and asked numerous questions ranging from the recruitment process



From left to right - LCDR Ubong Akpan, LCDR Elise Ngameni, Ms. Mary Andress, LT Folarin Ojowa, LT Vera Bijingsi

to benefits. They were also provided more information by way of the readily available recruitment materials available in Officer Secure Area of the Commissioned Corps Management Information System which contain vital information and follow up contacts.

One of many recruitment outreaches executed by BCOAG, the event was reported as being successful by the college with active participation of 130 students. One amazing experience we all had was seeing how the recruitment efforts went beyond the students. Many of the other recruiters were interested in what we do, posed lots of questions, and expressed their interest to join our service.

BOARD from page 2

- Expanded Family Member Scholarships and sent three officers to University of Maryland through the Jerry Michael Fellowship.
 - Published the PBS Documentary Invisible Corps showcasing the work the USPHS Commissioned Corps has done to protect, promote, and advance the health and safety of this nation. The documentary has:
 - o Seen 15,000 website visits.
 - o Screened and briefed in front of Congressional members and staff on Capitol Hill.
 - o Screened at 17 universities.
 - o Appeared in 15 film festivals and won five awards including Best Feature Length Documentary and Best Social Issue Documentary.
 - o Appeared on 36 PBS stations and streamed 1500 times.
 - Introduced new legislative call-to-action tool to make contact your representatives about legislation simple and at the touch of your finger tips.
- What are some of your proudest moments in 2023? What assignments helped you

learned the most? What is the most enjoyable part of your work (at work and home)? What was the most challenging part of this year for you? How did it help you grow? Was there a lesson learned? Take a moment to reach out to us at COA to share this with us on an individual or local branch level! Write a Frontline article.

In closing, may all your sweaters be merry, ugly, and bright! On behalf of the COA Board of Directors, we wish each of you a very merry holiday season filled with health, joy, reflection, and gratitude.

COA Receiving Award Nominations

The COA Awards Committee welcomes nominations for the following awards:

Health Leader of the Year

Recognizes civilians, retired active duty, or active-duty service members who have made notable contributions to the health of the Nation.

Local Branch of the Year

Recognizes the exceptional accomplishments of COA Local Branches. Each year, a Large Local Branch (60 members or more) and a Small Local Branch (fewer than 60 members) are recognized for their well-deserved efforts.

Civilian Outstanding Support of the USPHS

Presented to those civilian (individuals and/or groups) who have distinguished themselves in service to the Commissioned Corps.

Retired Officer of the Year

Recognizes excellence in continued service and contributions beyond active duty or government civilian service to the Association,

PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation, and to the members of COA Local Branches.

Local Branch Member of Year Award

(active local branch COA member) Recognizes excellence in contributions to the COA local branch, service to the association, and to the members thereof.

Local Branch Leader of the Year Award

(COA Local Branch Executive Committee member). Recognizes excellence in contributions to the COA local branch, service to the association, and to the members thereof.

Ready Reserve Officer of the Year Award

(Active COA Member and Member of the USPHS Ready Reserve). Recognizes excellence in contributions of our Ready Reserve officer.

Apply Online

If you would like to nominate an officer or need more information, please visit the COA Website under the Awards menu. The deadline to submit nominations is Friday, January 19, at 5 PM Eastern.



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Facing the Rising Sun: Uniting to Advance Health Equity and Promote Cultural Humility within the Commissioned Corps

by CAPT Beverly Dandridge, CAPT Melissa Briggs Hagen, CAPT Wanda Finch, CDR Sean Bennett, CDR Trang Tran, LCDR Tramara Dam, LCDR Jonetta Mpofu, LCDR Jorge G. Muñiz Ortiz, and LT Johanna Paillet-Growl

On May 8, 2023, at the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Scientific & Training Symposium in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the Black Commissioned Officers Advisory Group (BCOAG), Minority Officers Liaison Council (MOLC), and the Social Work Professional Advisory Group (SWPAG) successfully hosted an inaugural full-day Health Equity Pre-conference Seminar titled “Facing the Rising Sun: Uniting to Advance Health Equity and Promote Cultural Humility within the Commissioned Corps.” Systematic racism and social inequities have long contributed to disparities in health care access, quality of care, and health outcomes across the United States (U.S.) and globally. The goals of this full-day seminar aimed to: 1) help participating USPHS officers understand the health equity landscape in the U.S. and the historic and current contributors to health disparities, 2) articulate best practices to ensure equitable access to health care in medical and community settings, 3) advance health equity through partnerships, collaboration, and community engagement, and 4) enhance efforts to improve and promote equity, inclusivity, and cultural humility within USPHS and the agencies in which we serve.

Under the guidance of the Planning Committee, which included representatives from BCOAG, MOLC Cultural Ambassador Program, Asian Pacific American Officers Committee (APAO), and SWPAG, numerous officers worked tirelessly over many months



From left to right: LCDR Nicholas Cushman, LCDR Tramara Dam, LT Johanna Paillet-Growl, LCDR Jorge Ortiz Muniz, CAPT Melissa Briggs Hagen, CDR David Huang, CAPT Beverly Dandridge, CAPT Wanda Finch, LCDR Kimberly Evans, LCDR Stephany McGann, LCDR Erica Harker, LCDR Fabiola Carrero, and LCDR Lorener Brayboy

and selflessly managed and planned a comprehensive program .

The event kicked off with the inspiring opening remarks from CAPT Dandridge on behalf of RDML Aisha K. Mix to welcome over 50 distinguished guests and participants and set the stage for over 40 presenters.

Some of the courses presented included: Health Equity: Intersection of Race and Ethnicity, and Social Determinants of Health; The US Health Equity Landscape; History of Racism in Medicine and Public Health; and Cultural Humility Introspection Activity: Vision and Mission Statement.

Extensive dynamic discussions on how to use cultural humility and innovation to make positive changes equipped officers with concrete resources and tools to

enhance equity and inclusion both in the workplaces and the communities they serve. The successful event was positively recognized by the participants and USPHS leadership. We look forward to seeing the impact as officers promote and implement these approaches in the months ahead. Due to the substantial positive feedback received on this event, the planning committee will continue to offer similar seminars in the future.

Special thanks to all the Planning Committee members, presenters, and moderators for their outstanding leadership and contributions to make this inaugural event a great success, thereby establishing a strong foundation for future collaborations to continue advancing a more diverse and ready force for the USPHS Commissioned Corps.

LCDR Abigail visits NIH Childcare Centers

by LCDR Angelina Williams, DVM, MPH, DACLAM, FAC-COR and LCDR Dan Johnson, MPH, RDN, ACSM- CEP

During the month of November, LCDR Abigail (accompanied by her handler, LCDR Dan Johnson, a Dietitian officer) made three special appearances to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) sponsored Childcare Centers. Approximately 350 students, whose ages range from 2 to 12 years old, were delighted to have an opportunity to interact with her and learn more about her unique role as the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps' first official mascot. The visits were arranged by LCDR Angelina Williams, DVM, who is a newly appointed member of the NIH Childcare Board. LCDR Williams, an NIH employee, has been a veterinarian for 20 years and is passionate about educating others on powerful effects of the human-animal bond. She presented the idea to the Board to improve the mental well-being of the students and staff, and to increase the visibility of the Commissioned Corps as a recruitment effort for the youth at these centers who represent our future leaders.

Over the course of three days and in nearly 20 different classrooms, students greeted LCDR Abigail with inquisitive minds, asking questions of all kinds, expressing their curiosities about her uniform, rank, age, and all sorts of questions about her behaviors. One young student remarked that he could not wait to pet her because he was a self-proclaimed "dog-friendly" person. Most of the children were very comfortable in her presence and were thrilled to be able to give her treats. LCDR Williams read a book to

the preschool- aged children after a very informative Q&A session. LCDR Johnson (also stationed at NIH) shared with the children the benefits of service animals in helping humans live healthier lives. Dogs help humans by reducing or preventing stress, anxiety, and depression. Clinical studies have shown how petting an animal releases "feel-good" chemicals in the brain, like dopamine, which reinforces positive feelings, effectively countering the stressors of the workplace and/or home-life.

The Directors of the Childcare centers were grateful and appreciative to have LCDR Abigail visit their campuses and look forward to future visits in 2024. The centers are located on the NIH campus in Bethesda and in Rockville.

Enrollment in these centers is primarily comprised of dependents of employees of NIH and other federal agencies. Each center provides a special learning experience and recurring visits by LCDR Abigail will enhance that experience for these children. LCDRs Johnson and Williams will continue to partner in these efforts to support LCDR Abigail's mission to protect, promote, and advance the health of the nation through the human-animal bond.

The promotion of the human-animal bond through interactions with animals can combat loneliness and isolation, a recent health epidemic as declared by the U.S. Surgeon General, Vice Admiral Vivek H. Murthy. Among the current priorities of the U.S. Surgeon General are social connection, workplace well-being, and health

see **CHILDCARE** on page 12



Commissioned Officers Foundation 2024 USPHS Symposium Coin Design Contest

Submission Guidance

Deadline: January 1, 2024

Email Design to:

dcorrigan@coausphs.org

(Place name and "Symposium Coin Contest" in subject line)

Design Format: JPG or PNG

Design Suggestions:

- Represent Symposium Theme "Inclusivity + Innovation: Reducing Disparities in the Service of Health"
- "57th Annual USPHS Symposium"
- Location (Jacksonville, FL)
- Symposium Dates or Year
- USPHS Logo and unique design **OR** design both sides



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'A Special Holiday Thank You'

*To those who serve the underserved, those who run towards the unknown, and those who give up
their weekends, holidays, and sleep to keep us safe, Thank You!*

*You are the unsung heroes of this Nation. You are on the frontlines of the unknown. The ones who risk
their own health to protect ours. Day in and day out, you are working to make this world better, safer,
and healthier.*

*And although you do not get the recognition, we feel you deserve; we want you to know it does not go
unnoticed. Where others fear to go, you lead. Where others look away, you confront. Who others push
aside; you help.*

*And each of us at the Law Office of Shannon James is grateful for each of you, especially during this
holiday season. We know we have you to thank.*

*So to all our clients serving around the world.... Thank you / Gracias / Merci / Danke / Grazie /
Bedankt / Ahehee*

The Law Offices of Shannon James

LOVED ONE from page 5
and VA data about both the officer and spouse are up to date.

Then that dreaded inevitable day came, my wife of 52 years passed away after experiencing a severe stroke. When the death of a loved one occurs, it is emotionally devastating. Regardless, you honor your lost loved one by fulfilling the preplanned commitments each of you made. My wife was cremated, and her ashes placed in a cremation vase that I selected. I picked the cremation vase up at the funeral home, took it home, and carefully placed it on my wife's chair adjacent to my chair. We had three more weeks of being close to each other and I would say good morning and good night to her every day.

I contacted the National Scheduling Office, faxed my discharge papers, answered some questions, and was provided with a unique VA ID number. I then contacted the MA National Cemetery, provided the unique VA ID number, and answered some additional questions. Three weeks passed until I received the Certificate of Cremation; Disposition, Removal or Transportation Permit; and Certificate of Death. These documents were necessary for the MA National Cemetery to accept and place my wife's ashes in a columbarium.

I carefully placed the cremation vase in the car, placed the seat belt around it, and we took our final ride together to the MA National Cemetery. The entire way I told her how much I loved and missed her, that we would someday once again be together, and that I would faithfully visit her each week.

I carefully carried the cremation vase into the administration building and was immediately greeted by an employee who carefully took it from me and set it down on a counter. I provided the employee with the documentation I had received from the funeral home. The employee had a packet of information waiting for me. The employee provided me with two pages of religious emblems to view and I chose the appropriate one. Then the employee provided me with a columbarium granite niche marker verification form to complete and advised me that it would take sixty days to complete and install the marker; however, a temporary marker would be placed on a blank columbarium granite marker where my wife would be placed to rest. The mandatory inscription items are Name of decedent; Branch of service; Date of birth; and Date of death. If the officer has served in two military branches as I have done, both military branches can be inscribed on the columbarium marker.

The employee compassionately advised me that he personally would take very good care of my wife and that she was going to be placed in Section F3, Grave A21 which was in a beautiful and peaceful area. The employee provided me with a map of the cemetery showing me how to get to the columbarium where my wife would be placed to rest. I gave my wife one final kiss and a gentle hug and departed.

A few days later I received a letter from the MA National Cemetery advising me that my wife had been placed in the columbarium located in Section F3, Grave A21. I went to visit her the following day and followed the site directory map the employee had

provided me with the directions highlighted. This was a tremendous help to me because the cemetery is so large; however, the sections are well marked, and I was able to easily locate Grave A21 which was identified with a temporary marker. The permanent inscribed granite marker was attached sixty days later. I visit my wife every week and no matter the season, the cemetery grounds are impeccably maintained, and it is always so peaceful yet emotional for me. Knowing my wife is resting in peace and among the many veterans also resting in peace is comforting to me.

When I pass away, the MA National Cemetery will remove my wife from the columbarium and place her with me in our final resting gravesite. A new granite stone will be inscribed with each of our names, my two military branches, our year of birth, our year of death, religious emblem, and "Together for Eternity." We will have fulfilled our burial commitments to each other and rest in peace together for eternity.

I am grateful to all the employees at the National Cemetery Administration and MA National Cemetery for their professionalism, knowledge, compassion, and assistance provided to me throughout this very difficult and emotional time. Their dedication to serving veterans and spouses during this most difficult and emotional time is exemplary.

CHILDCARE from page 10

worker burnout. Because parents of NIH have access to the daycare centers on campus, this trickle-down relationship of impacting kids with LCDR Abigail's presence can directly impact the wellbeing of NIH employees, including USPHS officers. LCDR Abigail is present in the Mark O. Hatfield Clinical Research Center daily with LCDR Johnson, where they actively improve these priorities through visits to employees and patients. Every opportunity provided to meet her is a chance to share the crucial work of the USPHS, the Surgeon General's priorities, and enhance the health of our nation.



A child pets LCDR Abigail during her visit to the Childcare Centers.

Spiritual Wellness

CDR Katrina Redman, MT, SPOC, M.Div., PBCC

What does Advent mean?

I don't know about you, but after daylight savings time starts in early November, the short days and early onset of darkness make me feel cold. They make me feel like falling asleep by a warm fire... with a full belly. It turns out that there's a reason for this and it has to do with Advent.

The winter solstice is the day with the fewest daylight hours. It is when the northern hemisphere of the earth is pointed away from the sun. This year it will be on December 21st. After the winter solstice, there will be increasingly longer periods of daylight each day.

The word "Advent" means "the coming." Followers of Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and other Christian traditions celebrate Advent. Their traditions vary, but all these focus on the birth, or the coming, of Jesus Christ. Advent begins four Sundays before Christmas. During this religious practice, people may light Advent candles, prepare unique wreaths, hold special church services, or read specific Scriptures each day to reflect on the arrival of Jesus on Earth. Jesus is referred to in the Bible as "the light." Around the world, Pagan practitioners have observed the winter solstice as a response to the natural rhythms of the world, and an opportunity to look forward to the coming light as the daylight hours increase.

So, even though Pagans and Christians observe this time differently, and for different reasons, they all are looking forward to light. Light is necessary for crops to grow. It is warm. It helps us see. It reveals the beauty of the earth. Light is a very good thing! It gives us hope, peace, joy, and it makes us feel loved.

As USPHS officers, we have different ways in which we celebrate spiritually. However, there can still be common ground between us. Perhaps you have never observed another type of religious service, but you are curious about the traditions and practices of others. You don't have to become a follower of their beliefs, but you will grow in your understanding of others which is always spiritually healthy. Consider this an opportunity to share your own "light" with others!

May you all have a Merry Christmas, Happy Chanukah, Happy Kwanzaa, Happy Bodhi Day, and Joyful Winter Solstice!!



Education: Kinara

A candle holder for the 7-day Kwanzaa celebration. A candle representing the 7 principles is lit each day. They represent the people, their struggle, and their hope for the future.

Spiritual Exercises

1. Article: <https://bibleproject.com/guides/advent/#:~:text=People%20from%20Protestant%2C%20Roman%20Catholic,way%20to%20countdown%20to%20Christmas.>
2. Website: <https://www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org/>
3. Book: *The Return of the Light: Twelve Tales from Around the World for the Winter Solstice* by Carolyn McVickar Edwards

Questions? Comments? Contact me at khredman@hotmail.com.

Operation Magnolia: Reservists' Perspectives

by LTJG Osler Andres, PharmD; LTJG Sarah Beale, MPH; LTJG Toska Cooper, MPH; LTJG Leighland Feinman, PhD; LT John Heafner, MD, MPH; LTJG Lauren McGlade, RD, LD, CNSC; LTJG Clarisa Medina, MPH; LTJG Jacob Myers, MS, RD, CLC; LTJG Anikah Salim, DrPH, MPH, CPH; LTJG Jesse P. Samluk, PhD, Esquire; and LTJG Jason Slavoski, PharmD

Part-One of this article was published in November's *Frontline* (page 11).

Part-Two

The Logistics team had the task of meeting service and support needs of the FMS. A large part of this task required utilizing the federal cache for the site and monitoring resources to make sure supply levels remained adequate. The job entailed procuring extra resources necessary to providing medical services, arranging transportation for patients that needed further care, ensuring there was adequate food for patients and staff, and that the facilities were running at maximum efficiency. Sometimes that involved making certain generators were available, and there was enough fuel to run them. The scenario was not all patient care though; the team also received a crash course in ICS forms, such as the resource request form (ICS 213 RR), participated in meetings, and assisted in completing daily situation reports. This highlight is just a small sample of the overall duties accomplished by the group. This training was essential to understanding the Logistics section's role in establishing a successful operation.

Planning

In keeping with the ICS structure, the Planning section was a critical component of the overall incident response. The Planning section was responsible for the collection, evaluation, dissemination, and use of information about the development of the incident and the status of resources. During the training, the Planning section had the responsibility of ensuring proper documentation of the incident including the primary



Reservists, Ready Reserve Officers and Operation Magnolia cadre pose for a photograph in formation.

responsibility of developing the daily incident action plan (IAP). The IAP was provided to the IC and covered the actions to be implemented during each 24hr operational period.

The IAP first detailed the objectives of the incident, which included ensuring the welfare and continued care of patients housed at the FMS, providing case management services to patients, documenting all equipment and supplies received and used since the opening of the FMS, and finalizing the demobilization plan. The IAP further included the incident organizational chart and personnel assignment list, incident communications plan, incident medical plan, safety plan, resource status, weather updates and relevant maps. These components of the IAP were developed through collaboration with the Operations, Admin/Finance, PIO/LNO, Safety, and Logistics sections.

Throughout this incident, the planning section documented everything that happened during the exercise and worked with all sections to project and plan for what might happen in the future, along with contingency planning. The planning section was key to the overall mission by providing necessary information as

needed and ensuring that the overall objectives were met.

Safety

In the spirit of "Semper Gumby," the Safety teams had the responsibility of ensuring personnel, environmental, and occupational welfare in the setting of ever-changing situations and injects. During the fictional training, the Safety teams were challenged to be at the forefront of managing emergent flooding, lightning, and potential infectious disease outbreaks in the setting of a hurricane disaster. Our command staff compiled years' worth of deployment stories and beautifully distilled their experience into our 10-day training. Interestingly, the experience of the Safety officer mirrored real-life as our arrival at Camp Shelby was met with nearby tornadoes and lightning storm nearby. Being the nearest situated Commissioned Corps officers to real inclement weather, the Reserve Commissioned Corps and the safety teams were more than ready to respond to any call for assistance.

Public Information Officer/Liaison Officer

The PIO/LNO team at Operation Magnolia, consisting of 4 officers, was offered the opportunity to blend real-life

see **MAGNOLIA** on page 15

Aurora Borealis COA Branch Provides Naloxone Education and Training at Mat-Su Emergency Expo

by LT Kayla Vujovich, PharmD, CPH and CDR Christopher Chong, PharmD, MBA-HM, BCPS, AE-C

Aurora Borealis COA Branch officers partnered with local pharmacy team members and student pharmacists from the Idaho State University/University of Alaska Anchorage and Alaska's Project HOPE (Harm reduction, Overdose Prevention, and Education) to provide education and opioid overdose kits to the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Borough community at the 15th Annual Mat-Su Emergency Preparedness Expo. The Mat-Su Emergency Preparedness Expo showcases emergency preparedness and resources on how to respond effectively to emergencies ranging from house fires to earthquakes. This event provided an ideal platform to disseminate crucial information about naloxone and its life-saving potential in opioid overdose situations.

According to Alaska Department of Health, the Mat-Su region had the second highest number of opioid overdose deaths in Alaska in 2022 – a rate of 29.2 deaths per 100,000 people.¹ With the significant increase in opioid overdoses, the group's goal was to empower the Mat-Su community with knowledge and tools to respond to an overdose.

Four USPHS officers, four pharmacists, one pharmacy technician, and two student pharmacists engaged with 146 attendees and provided educational sessions for recognizing the signs of opioid overdose and hands-on training demonstrating proper administration of naloxone nasal spray. In total, 236 naloxone kits were distributed. Community members, emergency responders, and local homeless shelter representatives, were encouraged to



From left to right: CDR Christopher Chong, student pharmacist Megan Wesselman, student pharmacist David Besh, pharmacist Megan Penner, and LCDR Madalene Mandap showing off naloxone-containing emergency kits offered to the attendees of the 15th Annual Mat-Su Emergency Preparedness Expo

ask questions and to share their experiences and impacts from the opioid crisis. Some reported recently administering naloxone to save a loved one and shared their gratitude for the opportunity to receive naloxone kits without charge.

By partnering with local pharmacy team members, student pharmacists, and with Project HOPE, the group supported the ongoing efforts to combat the opioid overdose crisis through engaging and empowering the Mat-Su community.

References:

1. https://health.alaska.gov/dph/VitalStats/Documents/PDFs/DrugOverdoseMortalityUpdate_2022.pdf

MAGNOLIA from page 14

activity with scenario-based work. The PIO team was asked to prepare briefing materials and personally escort RDML Schobitz during his visit to officially kick off the scenario. PIO/LNO officers also conducted local media monitoring and responded to a variety of scenario-based events like a local official visit, media inquiries, and connection with local organizations to facilitate a coordinated disaster response with the FMS.

Operations

The Operations team had the responsibility of setting up the FMS, carrying out patient care, and responding to the many emergencies that arose during the disaster. The team hit the ground running with set up, intake, and triage of 20 patients within the first hour. Over the next two days, the Operations team streamlined its intake and triage process while simultaneously requesting further staff and equipment support to expand the capacity of the FMS from 55 to 105 patients. The Operations team created a 24-hour shift schedule to help keep both patients and staff safe and reasonably rested during the mission. The final stage of the mission was to coordinate patient transfers to a neighboring facility and demobilization. The training environment gave us

the opportunity to understand the breadth and depth of running an FMS amongst the chaos and exhausting turmoil of a natural disaster.

Conclusion

Operation Magnolia was a success on many levels, and it demonstrates the need to maintain and continually fund the reserve component, which would augment the active component as a force multiplier. Of note, this event brought together nearly 40% of the current reserve component for an inaugural training event that was organized within a month. Take into consideration the fact that reservists currently conduct virtual drills; as such, this event was the first time that reservists met each other in person, along with their regional commanders. This event expanded on what is typically taught in drill sessions: the overall deployment structure and how different components within the ICS structure function. This exercise put all the wheels in motion for reservists to see the “big picture.” It also showed that many events, good and bad, can happen on deployment and to plan for the unexpected. Finally, as reservists, it demonstrated that we can successfully meet mission objectives when called upon.

National Cemetery Administration Presentation to COA

by Dave Corrigan, COA Deputy Director

On November 8, COA hosted a virtual gathering for COA members interested in learning more about burial at a National Cemetery. Larry Provost, Outreach Coordinator for the National Cemetery Administration (NCA), presented the benefits of burial at a National Cemetery, how to complete pre-need applications, and how to apply for burial benefits if buried at a private cemetery.

NCA, one of the three branches of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), manages 155 National Cemeteries around the United States and territories and provides benefits to survivors of qualified veterans. USPHS officers are eligible for these benefits and encouraged to learn more about these benefits at cem.va.gov.

The presentation by Mr. Provost sparked interest in a COA member, CAPT (Ret.) Carl Chancey, to write an article about his experiences with applying for burial benefits at the Massachusetts National Cemetery. Carl shares his story in the next article.



The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) manages 155 National Cemeteries nation-wide. USPHS officers are encouraged to view the benefits of burial at a National Cemetery at cem.va.gov.



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Find Out What Your TRICARE Pharmacy Costs Will Be In 2024

by Military Health System and the Defense Health Agency
Strategic Communications Division

If you get prescription drugs through the TRICARE Pharmacy Program, Copayments for most beneficiaries are changing. The new costs will start Jan. 1, 2024.

A few factors affect your pharmacy costs. Your beneficiary category is one of them.

- Active duty service members (ADSMs): You'll pay nothing for covered drugs from military pharmacies, retail network, and home delivery.
- Survivors of ADSMs and medically retired service members and their family members: Your copayments won't change in 2024.
- All other beneficiaries: Your copayments will increase in 2024.

TRICARE has several categories of covered drugs. The drug category affects cost, as shown in the TRICARE Pharmacy Program Overview Fact Sheet. Generic formulary drugs are the least expensive and most widely available. This is followed by brand-name formulary drugs and non-formulary drugs.

Your costs also depend on the type of pharmacy you use. You'll pay nothing for prescriptions from military pharmacies. See the new copayments for other pharmacy types below. New costs are in bold.

TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery (Up to a 90-day supply)

- Generic formulary drugs will increase from \$12 to \$13.

- Brand-name formulary drugs will increase from \$34 to \$38.
- Non-formulary drugs will increase from \$68 to \$76.

TRICARE retail network pharmacies (Up to a 30-day supply)

- Generic formulary drugs will increase from \$14 to \$16.
- Brand-name formulary drugs will increase from \$38 to \$43.
- Non-formulary drugs will increase from \$68 to \$76.

Note: If you aren't an ADSM, you can't refill certain maintenance drugs after two refills at retail network pharmacies unless you pay full cost for the drug. If you live in the U.S. or U.S. territories, you must refill them at a military pharmacy or through home delivery after two refills.

Non-network pharmacies (Up to a 30-day supply)

Do you have a TRICARE Prime health plan? If so, your non-network pharmacy costs will stay the same. With a TRICARE Prime plan, you'll pay a 50% cost-share. This will happen after you meet your point-of-service deductible for covered drugs.

For other TRICARE plans, you'll pay a copayment or cost-share after you meet your annual deductible. These costs are as follows:

- Generic and brand-name formulary drugs will cost \$43 (up from \$38) or 20% of the total cost, whichever is more.
- Non-formulary drugs will cost \$76 (up from \$68) or 20% of the total cost, whichever is more.

ROCKY MOUNT from page 1

committed to addressing this exigency through strategic collaboration and healthcare provision.

The USPHS cadre wasted no time unloading the RAM eighteen-wheeler, staging the medical spaces, and ensuring that the team was ready to start triaging patients the following morning at 0530. Patients traveled from almost four hours away to receive this much-needed medical care. When the doors opened at 0600 Saturday morning, there was a line down the school sidewalk and our USPHS officers did not hesitate to jump into action and begin registering, triaging, and sending the patients to medical, dental or optometry for services. In addition to these services, the USPHS Rocky Mount team was able to provide diabetic dietary consultation by registered

dietitians, education on mental health hygiene from behavioral health staff, and a host of public health resources and products to improve their overall mental and physical health. The second day of the RAM event was no different from the first; many of the patients who were not able to be seen for dental returned on his date and our team worked quickly to triage and get them in the dental chair.

Over the course of two days the RAM team provided \$54,020 in services and treated 139 medically vulnerable community members. The USPHS team was assisted by RAM volunteers, high school and college students, and community members who worked alongside our officers to set up and break down the equipment, triage patients, and translate – all working in conjunction

to navigate the logistics of the event. Especially notable were the community volunteers who were fantastic hosts to the USPHS officers and provided much needed hospitality and nourishment to sustain the long shifts required to ensure all patients were seen.

In addition to the services provided during this RAM mission, LCDR Stephanie Avent later delivered 50 hygiene kits to the Durham Rescue Mission men's shelter on behalf of the USPHS team. It was wonderful to see our USPHS Commissioned Corps come together so quickly to provide service to this community.

If you're interested in finding out more about RAM and what you can do to get involved, visit RAMUSA.org

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR from page 1

Following a perusal of emails from the night before and early morning, I started my day with a 9 a.m. meeting with the President of the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation (COF) to discuss logistics for the “Invisible Corps” documentary screenings scheduled for October on Capitol Hill, and the George Washington Milken Institute of Public Health, the University of Maryland, the Department of the Interior, and the American Pharmacists Association headquarters (APhA).

At the conclusion of this meeting, I jumped onto the COF website where I updated the Symposium webpage to add the recently approved symposium theme “Inclusivity + Innovation: Reducing Disparities in the Service of Health.” If you have not visited the PHSCOF Symposium webpage lately, check it out at www.phscof.org/symposium. Following this update, I corresponded with the Assistant Secretary for Health (ADM Levine), the Surgeon General (VADM Murthy), the Deputy Surgeon General (RADM Hinton), and the CCHQ Director (RDML Schobitz) to share the theme and aims that were approved by the Symposium Planning Committee.

Next, Dave Corrigan, COA's Deputy Director, Bettilou Taylor, COA's Legislative Consultant, and I met regarding a colleague's idea to explore ways in which COA might seek an amendment to the *Pay Your Troops Act*. After contacting several Congressional offices and committees, we determined that a request to modify the proposed legislation was not possible during this session, but that does not mean we will stop advocating for USPHSCC officers to be paid should a government shutdown occur.

Following this meeting I followed up on our order for COF coins, which had been delayed for unknown reasons. After a quick lunch, I took a phone call from a 96-year-old-widow of a deceased COA Life Member. She called to inquire about her qualification for Department of Veterans Affairs burial benefits following the death of her husband. She does not use a computer or email, so I spent time on the phone with her, completing the form. I mailed the form to her for signature, provided a self-addressed envelope, along with a list of the documents she needed to send with the application. It is about time for me to check in with her to see if she received a response.

In the afternoon, Dave and I worked with Alan Echt, Chair of the Legislative Affairs Committee, and three COA members from Massachusetts, CAPT (Ret.) Carl Chan, CAPT (Ret.) Michael Stover, and CDR (Ret.) Al-Karim Dhanji, to review talking points and documents for a meeting scheduled with Dr. Jon Santiago, Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Services of Massachusetts. Following prep work for that meeting, I responded to a request from the Baltimore COA Local Branch who were busy helping coordinate the “Invisible Corps” documentary screening



COA members and staff meet with Massachusetts Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Services. Top L to R: CAPT (Ret.) Carl Chan, COA Executive Director Jacqueline Rychnovsky, COA Deputy Director Dave Corrigan, Middle L to R: CAPT (Ret.) Michael Stover, CAPT (Ret.) Alan Echt, Massachusetts Policy Advisor Nick Bornstein. Bottom L to R: CDR (Ret.) Al-Karim Dhanji, Secretary Jon Santiago.

on October 18. They were looking for past pictures from the symposium to help highlight the Corps for a student information table they were planning to set up after the screening.

After completing this task, I logged on to COA's Facebook page, dealt with a phishing email, scheduled social media posts, and made sure that the Veterans Days National Committee received our annual dues check since it had not yet been cashed. Staff then worked as a team to update the Congressional Award page and the Ready Reserve Award description on the COA website.

The final events of the day included correspondence and meeting planning with Heidi Audette, Communications and Legislative Director for the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs, to discuss how veterans are defined in Washington law. This meeting, which occurred the following day, went well and we feel Heidi and the State of Washington are committed to changing their statutes. In fact, we have recently heard back from her, and she has agreed to integrate language into a future bill being drafted that will clarify the definition of military (all eight federal uniformed services) and add language so Washingtonian USPHS veterans can qualify for veteran license plates. We will share any news once received.

It was a busy day for sure, and nothing would have been accomplished without the impressive team of COA staff, volunteers, and consultants. My best wishes to you for a peaceful and joyous holiday season. We look forward to serving you in 2024 and beyond.

Until next time!

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