Serving Beyond the Clinic: A Public Health Service Physician’s Congressional Fellowship Experience

by CDR Toya Kelley, USPHS

My personal journey through the healthcare system has been marked by tireless advocacy for my patients, but it’s also been fraught with witnessing the stark inequities that persist. From the glaring disparities in access to care based on race and socioeconomic status, to the systemic biases that shape patient outcomes, it all suddenly felt so heavy. Now, fueled by both discontent and a fierce sense of purpose, I was ready to channel my frustration into action—to challenge the status quo, amplify marginalized voices, and forge a path toward a more equitable healthcare landscape. I decided to step into the world of policymaking and bridge the gap between medical expertise and legislative action.

A Call to Service

After 15 years of direct patient care, the decision to pursue a Congressional fellowship stemmed from a deep-seated commitment to service and a desire to affect change on a broader scale. While my primary duty has been to provide medical care to our most vulnerable populations, I recognize the importance of addressing systemic healthcare challenges that extend beyond the clinic walls. By engaging in the legislative process, I sought to advocate for policies that not only benefit military personnel but also improve healthcare access and outcomes for all Americans.

The Fellowship Experience

In 2022, I was competitively selected as the first United States Public Health Service (USPHS) physician to participate in the Georgetown Government Affairs Institute Capitol Hill Fellowship. The fellowship began with a two-week classroom training alongside Navy servicemembers, where we learned about the legislative process and our roles as fellows. We then interviewed with several Congressional members’ personal offices and Congressional committees before our placement was solidified.

In January 2023, I had the honor of serving as the Health and Disability Legislative Fellow. One of my first opportunities to staff a meeting with Senator Duckworth, “The Boss,” was during her meeting with VADM Vivek Murthy.

I have been home less than 24 hours from the 57th Annual USPHS Scientific & Training Symposium, where nearly 1,300 officers, exhibitors, sponsors, and students gathered in Jacksonville, Florida for a week of learning and fellowship. My bags are sitting unpacked and ignored so I can tell you about a special event that occurred on Tuesday morning, June 25. Following an inspirational Opening Ceremony kickoff by the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation Board of Trustees President, CAPT (Ret.) Gene Migliaccio, I had the pleasure of introducing a public health advocate and the 45th mayor of Jacksonville, Donna Deegan. Anyone who reads her biography or visits her website can immediately tell that she values the work you do, because public health is one of her three mayoral priorities. You heard me, public health! As a three-time breast cancer survivor, award winning journalist, and non-profit founder, she understands the value of public health. To show her appreciation, Mayor Deegan read the following
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Legislative Update

by CAPT (Ret) Alan Echt, Chair of COA Legislative Affairs Committee

This is my final column as the Chair of the 2023-24 COA Legislative Affairs Committee (LAC) and as a member of the COA Board of Directors and the COF Board of Trustees. I want to thank the Vice-Chair, LT Evan Williams, the past Chair, LCDR Christopher G. Mendoza-Truong, and the members of the Committee for their service and support. I want to give a special thanks to the Committee’s long-time Secretary, LCDR Travis Sorum, for his steadfast service. When this term’s Committee members meet for the last time on June 20th, we will vote on a list of priorities for the first term of the 119th Congress. That list will be presented to the COA Board of Directors for their approval when they convene on June 23rd. COA’s advocacy staff will then develop talking points and briefing materials to present to members of the new Congress when they convene in January.

During my tenure as LAC Chair, COA began using New Mode call to action software to allow members to send advocacy messages directly to their elected officials. I’m proud of the role the Committee played in reviewing and approving the software. I’m grateful to former COA Deputy Director (and Marine Corps Major) David Corrigan for his diligence in identifying and reviewing the software choices and launching the New Mode application.

Dave and I also worked together to update the COA Guide to State Income Tax on USPHS Retirement Pay. David worked with COA members in Delaware, South Carolina, and Virginia to help them advocate for expanding armed forces retirement pay income tax exemptions in those states to include the USPHS. Unfortunately, to date, those efforts have not yet succeeded. Likewise, a bill to expand Arizona’s active-duty income tax exemption failed to pass. David also worked with COA members in Michigan and Massachusetts to expand their states’ definitions of veteran to include the USPHS. Those efforts are also still works in progress. Update: On June 30, the last day of the legislative session, the Delaware House of Representatives passed SB 329, which expands Delaware’s $12,500 military pension income tax subtraction for retirees under age 60 to include the USPHS and NOAA Corps. It awaits action by the Governor.

Dave and Bettiol Taylor (COA’s Government Affairs Consultant) met with over a dozen House and Senate Congressional staff to educate them on the importance of this year’s legislative priorities. But the hyper-partisan environment in Congress and the reluctance to advance any legislation that has a cost associated with it made advancing any of those priorities extremely difficult. For example, Senator Tammy Duckworth’s (D-IL) bill, S. 2297, the Parity for Public Health Service Ready Reserve Act, only has one cosponsor, fellow Democratic Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon (just as Senator Wyden’s bill, the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned
I am currently sitting in Jacksonville Airport reflecting on the 57th Annual USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium and its theme of Inclusivity and Innovation. First, I would like to thank everyone who was involved in the planning, those who volunteered to share their knowledge and expertise, and you all, for your membership. Everything we do is possible because of interprofessional partnerships.

The definition of interprofessional, which is also now stated in the new COF Strategic Plan, is when different healthcare professionals with diverse knowledge, skills, and talents collaborate to achieve a common goal. Interprofessional is a core strength of the Commissioned Corps, which is encapsulated in the 11 categories, each of which are reflected in the COA bylaws with representations and diversity of our board. It’s also uniquely been reflected in our chair lineage the last few years (Pharmacists, Dietitian, EHO, Therapist, Engineer) and the deep engagement via our local branches.

As I step into the role of COA Board Chair, I am both honored and excited to lead our association into an era of strong and valued interprofessional collaboration. Recently, we concluded a successful conference focused on inclusivity and innovation. The discussions and ideas shared have invigorated our commitment to create a diverse and forward-thinking environment.

Inclusivity: We explored how embracing diverse perspectives enhances our collective ability to address complex public health challenges.

Innovation: We discussed the importance of innovative approaches and technologies in advancing our mission and improving public health outcomes.

By leveraging the unique skills and perspectives of our various professions, we can develop comprehensive solutions to public health challenges we face. In the last year, inclusivity and innovation have emerged as a central part of our strategy for Engage, one of the four pillars of COA’s strategic plan. There has been a lot of renewed focus and momentum on retirees within the COA Retired Officers Committee (ROC). As an example, CCHQ and the COA ROC are partnering to foster collaborative efforts to engage retirees to support a model for interagency collaboration for the Indian Health Services/CCHQ strategic plan.

Change is possible because of COA membership and active participation at both the local and national levels are vital. By engaging with COA, you become a part of a larger movement dedicated to advancing public health. Your involvement helps us advocate for policies and initiatives that support commissioned officers and improve public health outcomes. Together, we can make a significant impact. I encourage all members to stay engaged and invite new professionals to join our association. Your participation is essential to our collective success.

As we move forward, let’s continue to build on our strengths, embrace new ideas, and work collaboratively to advance our mission. Thank you for your dedication and commitment to COA and the USPHS. I’d also like to take a moment to extend a sincere thank you COA/COF and CCHQ leadership, and our industry partners, for modeling this level of partnership.

Together, we are stronger.

Together, we innovate.

Together, we advance public health.
The Work of the Commissioned Officers Foundation (COF): A Quick Year in Review as President of COF

by CAPT (Ret) Gene Migliaccio, Immediate Past President, COF Board of Trustees

For my last column, I want to thank our COF Board of Trustees (BOT) for the privilege to serve as this year’s President, review work on our strategic plan, present a status update of my goals from July 2023 to present, and share my top 10 COF secrets.

First, what an honor to serve as COF President with so many committed retired officers and industry partners on our BOT. A definite highlight of my public health career. In 2013 and 2014 I had also served as COF President with many of the founding COF trustees – they would be so proud to see the progress we have made.

In January 2024, the BOT started work on a five-year strategic plan and at our June BOT quarterly meeting approved, in concept, a new vision, mission, values, and strategic pillars (goals). I will share this information in my Top 10 COF Secrets. Over the next year, the COF staff will assist us in crafting objectives to fulfill our strategic pillars.

In my first column I wrote in July 2023, I had three goals that I wanted to work on with the BOT and was privileged to receive their support. The three goals are as follows:

• To increase our financial resources by supporting COFs development efforts. My focus was to support RDML Steve Solomon’s work on development with his outstanding committee. Together we learned a great deal about our development requirements that will be carried forward in our five-year strategic plan.

• To increase the level of educational funding for our U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) officers for their professional development in public health and leadership. A quick update: At our June 2024 BOT meeting we approved $100,000 to support officer professional development. Work will need to be completed this year on processes to allocate these designated funds for officer development – but the bottom-line - the BOT allocated the funds!

• To advocate and support the distribution of the PBS documentary – Invisible Corps – that focuses on our heritage. RDML Pam Schweitzer was our trail blazer working on Invisible Corps making magic happen throughout the year. Here are a few statistics: entered into 20 film festivals throughout the nation winning six majors awards; 130+ PBS showings; 30+ screening at universities, available on the edX platform for public health students; and shared on numerous podcasts.

Gene’s Top 10 COF Leadership Secrets (my secrets/thoughts for our success)

1. COF’s Mission: USPHS Commissioned Corps officers are recognized as America’s preeminent leaders and trusted sources in public health.

2. COF’s Vision: COF empowers and inspires current and former USPHS Commissioned Corps officers to improve all people’s health.

3. COF’s Values: Collaboration, Diversity and Inclusion, Education and Professional Growth; and Excellence

4. COF’s Strategic Pillars (goals): Awareness, Engagement, Communication, Education and Training, and Collaborative Partnerships and Alignment

5. Leadership vs. Chickenship. It’s all about leadership! Leadership is the key that will drive each of us to make significant contributions to the work we all do in public health. What I admire most is genuine and authentic leaders that mobilize people to thrive and survive to make a difference, to take on the tough challenges, to be creative and innovative in their approach, and add value that sustains communities.
South Texas Middle School Students Learn Proper Handwashing Technique to Prevent Spreading Disease

by LCDR Ngozi Mezu-Patel, LCDR Steven Trevino, LT Christina Beach-Baumgartner, LT Jordan Drelich, LT Xin Ying Oh, and LT Florian Ojowa

On March 8, 2024, six U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) officers presented to middle school students during a career day at Wilder Intermediate School in Shertz, Texas. LCDR Ngozi Mezu-Patel, LCDR Steven Trevino, LT Christina Beach-Baumgartner, LT Jordan Drelich, LT Xin Ying Oh, and LT Florian Ojowa leveraged the occasion to both provide health education and reach kids early about opportunities for their future as USPHS officers.

Officers presented to a total of 92 students and five teachers in five classes. To begin, each officer described their career and service experience in the USPHS Commissioned Corps. Due to the variety of disciplines represented, the students gained valuable insight to what it means to be a physician, physician’s assistant, nurse practitioner, pharmacist, and public health researcher.

After talking about career opportunities, the USPHS officers used a Prevention through Active Community Engagement (PACE) presentation to talk about disease prevention and how to prevent the spread of disease through the very simple act of washing your hands. Following the lesson on the proper technique to wash hands, students had an opportunity to observe the importance of following the best practices described in the presentation. In each class, USPHS officers asked for two student volunteers. One volunteer received instructions to wash their hands quickly and the other received coaching in proper handwashing technique. Officers used GloGerm lotion and a blacklight to show students the difference between quick handwashing and using the best practices.

The students loved the handwashing demonstration. The USPHS officers had fun, too. They couldn’t believe how many “germs” remained on the hands of the students who washed their hands quickly compared to the students who followed the best practices. USPHS officers had a wonderful time reminding students that we all play a role in disease prevention and inspiring students to consider a career in the USPHS Commissioned Corps.

Occupational Therapists for Mental Health Awareness Month

by LT Devon Barbieri, OTR/L and LT Keagan Carpenter, OTR, OTD

This year we celebrate 74 years since the United States Congress designated the month of May as National Mental Health Awareness month. Since 1949, Mental Health Awareness month has provided an opportunity for organizations to raise awareness and promote actions around mental health issues. Key findings from Mental Health America indicates over 50 million adults in the USA were living with mental illness from 2019-2020, with 28.2% reporting they were not able to access the care they needed. In treatment teams across the country, you may find a variety of professionals who use their professional lens to address psychological disorders, including occupational therapy practitioners. Although we transitioned out of May, we want to continue to emphasize the importance of mental health care all year round.

The field of occupational therapy can be traced back to the early 20th century with the creation of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene in 1909. The efforts of Mental Health America founder, Clifford Beers, philosopher Williams James, and psychiatrist Adolp Myer, laid the foundation for psychological care for soldiers and sailors returning home after WWI. At this time, “reconstruction aides” were initially trained to assist injured soldiers in regaining physical functions and adapting to disabilities. This early form of rehabilitation led to the emergence of occupational therapy as the distinct profession we know today. With the recognition of the interconnectedness of physical and mental health, occupational therapists’ scope of practice encompasses psychological well-being in conjunction with physical rehabilitation. As mental health treatment...
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Advocating for the Mental Health of our Population through Public Health and Nursing

by LT Tessa Fletcher DNP, FNP-BC, PMHNP

In May, there was a lot to celebrate: Public Health, Mental Health, Older Adults, Nurses’ Week, Women’s Health Week, and Memorial Day. As our populations change with differences in workforce generations and a large aging population, recognizing and supporting health factors that affect individuals and communities is necessary.

Significant progress has been made in public health and nursing in destigmatizing mental health issues, particularly among vulnerable populations. As we celebrate this health awareness and commemorate Public Health, Mental Health, and Nurses’ Week, it’s crucial to highlight the strides made in raising awareness and advocating for the mental well-being of our aging community members.

Over the years, significant progress has been made in dismantling the stigma surrounding mental health. Conversations once shrouded in secrecy and shame are now being brought to the forefront, thanks to the dedication of healthcare professionals, community support, and public health awareness. Through education, outreach programs, and community engagement, the narrative around mental health slowly shifted from fear and misunderstanding to empathy and support.

However, despite these advancements, much work remains, especially concerning our aging population. Older adults often face unique challenges that can exacerbate mental health issues, such as social isolation, physical health concerns, and the loss of loved ones. Moreover, societal attitudes toward aging and mental health can further compound these difficulties, leading to underreporting and untreated conditions.

In the daily interactions of mental health nurses with older adults, there lies an opportunity for profound impact. By integrating routine practices that promote mental well-being, such as active listening, validation of emotions, and fostering a sense of belonging, we continue to create spaces of trust and support. Simply being present, whether as a compassionate listener or a comforting presence, can make a world of difference to someone struggling with their mental health.

Furthermore, embracing the concept of neurodiversity within the aging population is essential. Neurodivergent individuals, including those with conditions such as dementia or Alzheimer’s disease, deserve understanding and acceptance. By recognizing and accommodating diverse cognitive abilities, mental health nurses can provide more inclusive and effective care tailored to individual needs. It is essential to be aware that screening, diagnosis evaluation, and diagnosis of other neurodivergent conditions that can affect cognition may not have been diagnosed earlier in their lives.

Collaboration and community involvement are essential in advocating for the mental health of our aging population. Public health initiatives that promote social connections, recreational activities, and access to mental health services can significantly enhance the well-being of older adults. Additionally, raising awareness about the importance of mental health screenings and destigmatizing seeking help for psychological concerns are vital components of advocacy efforts.

May’s awareness of health issues allowed us to reaffirm our commitment to being agents of change in the fight against mental health stigma and burnout. By continuing to educate, advocate, and support our aging population, we can create a future where mental health is prioritized and accessible to all.

In conclusion, public health mental health nurses play a crucial role in destigmatizing mental health issues among the aging population. Through routine practices of empathy, understanding, and advocacy, nurses can significantly impact the mental well-being of older adults. By embracing neurodiversity and promoting community engagement, we can create a society where mental health is valued and supported at every stage of life.
A Sneak Peak of the 57th Annual USPHS Scientific & Training Symposium

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Preparing the Pacific for Potential CBRNE Events

by LCDR Joseph Foss, MSN, RN, APRN, FNP-C and CDR Kazu Okumura, MA, REHS, CP-FS, CPH

In the Indo-Pacific, the U.S. and its allies continue the geopolitical competition with our largest neighbors. For the U.S. Affiliated Pacific Islands (USAPI) that the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR) oversees, it is only a matter of time they become the setting for a future kinetic event. To prepare to respond to kinetic events, ASPR hosted officials from all the USAPIs for a Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and High Yield Explosive (CBRNE) workshop. It was a great opportunity for the public health and medical authorities in all the jurisdictions to learn the planning activities they will need to conduct to prepare for a CBRNE event. In addition to the host territory of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), Guam, American Samoa, the Republic of Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Marshall Islands were invited to take part in the workshop.

ASPR is the lead federal agency for Emergency Support Function (ESF)-8, Public Health and Medical Services, during a disaster response. ASPR oversees all 50 states, five U.S. Territories, and the three nations covered under the Compact of the Freely Associated States.

The workshop featured presentations by all six jurisdictions on their current medical capability and preparedness. Subject matter experts (SME) from various organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Department of Defense (DoD), the 94th Civil Support Team from the Guam National Guard, U.S. Naval Hospital Guam, U.S. Agency for International Development, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the Radiation Injury Treatment Network helped train over 150 public health and emergency management professionals. The workshop sessions have made what seemed like an impossibility to our regional partners something actionable and achievable. The planning focused on empowering local responders and ensuring equitable access to tools, support, and resources. SMEs ensured that tools and resources were culturally appropriate and sensitive to the historical connections to nuclear weapons in the Pacific. Through the planning and the coordination of the U.S. Federal agency partners, it has also assisted regional operational readiness and created new connections. The workshop led to building capacity, enhance preparedness and resilience in the Pacific Islands, and demonstrate to our competitors the United States is ready for what the future may hold.
Up Close and Personal: The Deputy US Surgeon General Sees the Impact of Arizona Officers

by CAPT Sara Newman, DrPH, MCP; LT Jamila Rizek, DNP(c), MBA, MSN, RN, CEN, CPEN, NHDPC-BC, NRP; and Annalise Basch, REHS/RS

Deputy U.S. Surgeon General, Rear Admiral Denise Hinton visited Arizona in May 2024 to celebrate the partnership between the USPHS Commissioned Corps and the National Park Service (NPS) at an event at Grand Canyon National Park. However, the trip provided much more. “This was an important visit for me,” says RADM Hinton. “In addition to celebrating this tremendous partnership between the USPHS and NPS and connecting with this sacred place on a personal level, I was also able to appreciate firsthand the critical work officers do in a complex environment to prevent disease and promote health.” She also noted how grateful she was to visit the Phoenix Indian Medical Clinic (PIMC) upon her arrival to Arizona. RADM Hinton was warmly welcomed by Rear Admiral Michael D. Weahkee, Deputy Director, Phoenix Area, Indian Health Service (IHS), and the clinic staff. Following her visit, RADM Hinton noted “It was inspiring to see the many officers and civilians and learn how they work hand-in-hand to address the complex health needs of more than 156,000 patients representing nearly 70% of the 574 federally recognized Tribes.” She continued, “This job allows me to see the profound impact our public health officers have daily in our nation to improve the lives of the communities we serve, and this site visit made it even clearer.”

The work of the USPHS officers assigned to the NPS is to protect the visitor experience in national parks so they can continue to serve as spaces of health and healing for current and future generations. RADM Hinton spent a day at Grand Canyon National Park accompanying park leadership, staff, and several officers from the NPS Office of Public Health on visits to some key sites where USPHS officers conduct inspections of water, wastewater systems, and food services. The NPS Office of Public Health provided a high-level overview of what USPHS officers do across the country in the NPS, using Grand Canyon National Park as an example. To discuss the critical work of food safety inspections, RADM Hinton looked for evidence of pests and checked food holding temperatures at a food facility. The site visits demonstrated the challenges USPHS officers face in providing public health consultation in national parks, where there are unique public health challenges. Grand Canyon National Park, for example, serves 5 million annual visitors. Water and waste must flow through a complex canyon system, and there are diverse disease risks, from vector borne and zoonotic diseases such as plague and rabies, to food- and waterborne illnesses in rafting trips on the Colorado River.

RADM Hinton’s visit to Grand Canyon also included time to appreciate the value of national parks as health resources and sources of healing. During a sacred walk along the Bright Angel trail led by Havasupai tribal spiritual leader James Uqualla, Grand Canyon Superintendent Ed Keable, CAPT Sara Newman, Annalise Basch, and CDR Ronan King.

Retired Officer Rear Admiral Pam Schweitzer and her husband Paul (left and left rear) join a hike with current USPHS officers and NPS staff including (From left to right) LCDR Rizek, RADM Denise Hinton, Havasupai tribal spiritual leader James Uqualla, Grand Canyon Superintendent Ed Keable, CAPT Sara Newman, Annalise Basch, and CDR Ronan King.
Community and Camaraderie: Recap of the First DC COA Pickleball Tournament and the Importance of Social Connection

by CAPT Jonathan Kwan, MS, LCDR Oliver Ou, PhD, FAC-COR II, LCDR Gavin O’Brien, PharmD, BCGP, and LCDR Lisa Huang, PharmD, MPH

D.C. Commissioned Officers Association (DC COA) hosted its first-ever pickleball tournament on April 20, 2024, and it was an experience in social connection and camaraderie among pickleball enthusiasts and newcomers. With its meteoric rise in popularity, pickleball found its place in the heart of many officers happy to share their knowledge and skills on the court. Our Surgeon General, Vice Admiral Vivek Murthy, has long emphasized the importance of social connection and togetherness – and DC COA has taken notice and championed these values among officers.

The pickleball tournament was attended by 30 participants and cheering squads (officers, friends, and family members) that encouraged lively and competitive games. Teams of two players were randomly paired and changed after each game – round-robin style – to foster teamwork and togetherness among all players. Each game spanned approximately fifteen minutes with players attempting to score as many points as they can in that time frame. The tournament lasted three hours, and afterwards, points were tallied and the players with the most points were celebrated. Many officers forged new friendships as they leveled up their pickleball skills.

So, how does this relate to our mission as U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps Officers? We strive to advance Vice Admiral Murthy’s priorities through various strategies. Specifically, DC COA championed his priority of social connection, health, and well-being by organizing interactive and fun recreational activities that instill friendship and camaraderie among officers. We know that feeling a part of a community is important for both mental and physical health. For example, poor social relationships, social isolation, and loneliness can increase heart disease or stroke risk by approximately 30%. Chronic loneliness and social isolation can increase the risk of developing dementia by about 50%. Ultimately, positive relationships affect our health through biological, psychological, and behavioral interactions. The importance of nurturing community and camaraderie among officers is vital to our role in advancing Vice Admiral Murthy’s priorities.

A recent meta-analysis showed significant improvements in life satisfaction, depression, stress, and personal well-being in the pickleball players. In addition to these benefits, pickleball promotes an excellent cardiovascular workout by increasing heart rate with participants averaging approximately 3,000 steps per hour.4 This winning combination is perfectly summed up by Vice Admiral Murthy, “pickleball has tapped into something that we’ve known for a long time but need to be reminded of—meeting up in person, getting some exercise, and playing a sport, whether you’re a child or an adult—these are all part of what it means to be human. We need connection and time with others to thrive, just as we need food and water.”5 We hope you’ll join us as we battle it out at our next DC COA Pickleball Tournament.

References:


Reprinted from the University of Utah Department of Family Medicine News, April 11, 2024

The Department of Family and Preventive Medicine (DFPM) is saddened to note the death of David N. Sundwall, MD.

Dr. Sundwall was an esteemed colleague and a fierce advocate in the fields of public health and primary care. He was a pioneer of public health policy, making significant contributions to the field for over 30 years.

Dr. Sundwall was an alumnus of the University of Utah School of Medicine, receiving his medical degree in 1969. He was one of the earliest medical students in the United States to train in the newly founded specialty of family medicine and one of the first physicians to train others.

Early in his career, the Utah native spent more than two decades in Washington D.C., serving in several government and private health sectors.

While there, his work was wide-ranging and impactful. Dr. Sundwall worked as the president of the American Clinical Laboratory Association and played a pivotal role in developing health policies at the federal level as director of the health staff of the U.S. Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee. Later, he would act as the administrator for the Health Resources and Services Administration.

In addition to these posts, he served as Assistant Surgeon General in the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) and contributed to major task forces and committees determining the shape and impact of national healthcare efforts. Dr. Sundwall also spent time volunteering weekly at the HealthCare for Homeless Project.

Upon returning to Utah, he served as the executive director of the Utah Department of Health for six years. In addition to his high-profile appointments, Dr. Sundwall continued to volunteer his clinical skills at various clinics in Salt Lake City, caring for medically underserved populations.

In 2011, Dr. Sundwall joined DFPM’s Division of Public Health as a professor, where he taught courses and provided mentorship to students. He held the position for seven years until his retirement in 2018, when he was awarded the title of professor emeritus.

The Utah Medical Association named Dr. Sundwall as Utah’s Doctor of the Year for 2014. He was honored for his dedication to the healthcare field at the Utah State Capitol by Governor Gary Herbert.

DFPM and Division of Public Health hosted the inaugural David N. Sundwall Lectureship on Public Health Policy in October 2017 to celebrate Dr. Sundwall’s contributions to the public health field. The series brings public health policy leaders from across the world to share their experiences in public health.

For all his accolades and accomplishments, Dr. Sundwall may be best remembered for his kindness and modesty. Despite the titles he accrued throughout his career, he always introduced himself simply as “a family doctor from Murray.”

“Dr. Sundwall embodied the mission of the public health field through his care and concern for others,” said John Barrett, MD, interim chair of DFPM, in a letter to the department announcing Dr. Sundwall’s passing.

Dr. Sundwall was a prominent figure in public health policy and advocacy. His passion and invaluable contributions have left a legacy that continues to shape public health and primary care.
Honoring Captain “BAD” Beverly A. Dandridge

by LT Linda Ekperi, DrPH

On February 2, 2024, United States Public Health Service (USPHS) officers nationwide bid fair winds and following seas to a living legend – CAPT Beverly Ann Dandridge, affectionately known as CAPT “BAD” during her retirement ceremony. CAPT Dandridge served as a USPHS Nurse officer for 27 years - first as a Family Nurse Practitioner and Health Service Administrator, and later as a National Medical Recruiter with the Federal Bureau of Prisons. CAPT Dandridge then served as the Transformation Officer for Recruitment at the USPHS Commissioned Corps Headquarters.

During the latter part of her career, from, she served as the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Commissioned Corps Chief Liaison Officer. Her efforts streamlined the agency’s USPHS personnel management processes, fostered effective collaborative relationships with over 200 leaders, enhanced the component’s service delivery scope, and increased recruitment and retention numbers among healthcare professionals working in Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facilities. She single-handedly established the DHS Office of Commissioned Corps Liaison (OCCL), which included hiring five officers to support enhanced interagency collaboration, expanded oversight of agency resources, and provided guidance for supervisors and 633 officers across nine DHS components.

However, CAPT Dandridge’s goal was not to acquire awards or recognition but rather help as many people as possible, including community members and fellow officers. Her impact was such that the attendee limit for her retirement ceremony was surpassed. The overwhelming support for CAPT Dandridge’s retirement reflected the impact she made on so many. It was no surprise that, as an active senior officer and the immediate past senior advisor for the Black Commissioned Officers Advisory Group’s (BCOAG) Behavioral Health Ad Hoc Committee, she was nicknamed the “BCOAG Mom.” She advocated for officers, provided advice and comforting words, and was always there for everyone. The sentiment “CAPT Dandridge is one who truly never sleeps and is always looking for ways to assist and uplift her fellow officers for the good of the whole,” still rings true.

CAPT Dandridge had a major impact upon my career. During my early days in USPHS, I experienced a few major tragedies that could have broken even the strongest person. However, it was my unwavering faith and CAPT Dandridge’s words of encouragement that kept me going through the challenging times. Specific words she stated to me were: “Life challenges remind us that all things occur in their proper time. Remain optimistic and true to self. Your focused efforts will not go unnoticed or unrecognized. Praying for you and your family.” I instantly thought to myself “who was this amazing woman?” Someone who calmed anxious feelings with her kind loving words. A woman in which every interaction was pleasant. She was someone who always seemed to have time to talk, despite her busy schedule. I was truly inspired by her, as she always reminded DHS USPHS officers to prioritize self-care and maintain a healthy work-life balance.

During the interview for this article, CAPT Dandridge graciously provided a few “Points of Power:” Remember to have confidence and recognize you have the ability to achieve your goals; Sometimes it takes everyone working together to accomplish a task; Don’t focus on promotion and awards only, do your very best at your job and in time, those accolades will come. CAPT Dandridge stated she “wants to see officers make individual footprints in their respective agencies in order for officers to perform at an outstanding level.” After the interview, she made me promise to step outside, get fresh air, or take a short walk. I laughed because I should have expected to hear those words from such a genuine and caring woman.

In her most humble way, CAPT Dandridge was always there to help navigate my career and life and I will keep the lessons I learned from her very close to my heart. It was an honor to work with her and to participate in her retirement ceremony as a USPHS Music Ensemble member and during the traditional junior officer cake cutting experience. I thank her for her years of dedicated and faithful service to the USPHS, for being a change agent, a trailblazer, and a trusted confidant. She will be sincerely missed at work but not too far away, she assures me.

Ma’am, I salute you, Bravo Zulu!
Assistant for Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), affectionately known as “The Boss.” During this 12-month fellowship, I was actively engaged in the legislative process, contributing my medical knowledge to discussions on healthcare reform, public health initiatives, and healthcare access. I drafted legislation from start to finish and conducted policy research to advise “The Boss” on healthcare matters. I collaborated with colleagues from diverse backgrounds, built coalitions across party lines, and advocated for policies that promote the health and well-being of the uniform service community and the nation as a whole.

Examples of How I Addressed Health Equity:


2. Introduced legislation to improve national security by strengthening the USPHS Commissioned Corps.

3. Wrote an oversight letter calling for expanded access to over-the-counter contraceptives at no cost for servicemembers and their families.

4. Introduced legislation to ensure paid leave benefits for families experiencing pregnancy loss and a financial investment in research to decrease pregnancy loss.

5. Wrote an oversight letter to manufacturers of a pediatric RSV immunization regarding shortage of the supply to better protect children’s health in the future.

Through this fellowship, I gained a better understanding and appreciation of the oversight scrutiny, budget evaluation, and organizational review by Congress that government agencies experience. This opportunity introduced me to drafting legislation, answering constituent inquiries, and coordinating with senior staff members of various committees and subcommittees. I learned firsthand how imperative it is that the USPHS Commissioned Corps have a legislative liaison that stands ready to educate congressional members and staff not only on our value and capabilities, but also on our challenges.

Bridging the Gap

One of the most significant contributions of having uniform service physicians in congressional offices is our ability to bridge the gap between the military and civilian healthcare sectors. By sharing our expertise and firsthand experiences, we help policymakers better understand the intricacies of military healthcare delivery, the unique challenges faced by servicemembers and our families, and the importance of ensuring seamless transitions in care between servicemembers and civilian providers. Physicians help ensure that healthcare policies are grounded in evidence and responsive to the needs of healthcare providers and patients alike by translating complex medical concepts into understandable language for policymakers.

Conclusion

“Fight for things you care about but do it in a way that will lead others to join you.” Ruth Bader Ginsburg’s quote beautifully encapsulates the essence of effective advocacy and leadership. By leveraging our expertise and passion, we can make a significant difference in the lives of countless individuals and communities, both domestically and globally.
PACE Outreach at the 2024 Maryland Day

by LT Alex Artcher, BSN, MPH, CCHP; LCDR Jonathan Leshin, Ph.D.; LT Gifty Tuffour, MPH, BSN, RN; LT Tessa Fletcher, DNP, FNP-BC; LT Catherine Lamptey, BSN, TNCC; LT Pamela Agaba, MBA, BSN, RN, CCHP; and LTJG Andrew Jennings, BSN

On Saturday, April 27, 2024, 29 U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps Officers represented Prevention through Active Community Engagement (PACE) by participating in the 2024 Maryland Day event at the University of Maryland (UMD). The outreach objectives were to promote the USPHS mission, use of naloxone in opioid overdoses, importance of mental health, and to encourage healthy lifestyles. The event also served as a backdrop for USPHS recruitment.

Maryland Day is one of UMD’s major community outreach events. PACE collaborated with UMD’s School of Public Health whose dean is RADM (ret) Boris D. Lushniak, former Acting Surgeon General (July 2013-December 2014). This event can have north of 80,000 attendees.

The booth engaged over 700 visitors throughout the day. We offered resources on public health (e.g., flyers, live demonstration) including information on healthy eating and mental health. Children who visited the booth were very curious about the 3D face models displayed on the table for naloxone practice. Many visitors seemed curious about the cluster of officers in blue, so officers gave our audience a rousing introduction to USPHS and our mission. Officers directed prospective candidates to appropriate USPHS recruitment resources.

While it rained throughout most of the day, our esprit de corps was not doused. This outreach event was a great success as it provided officers opportunities to educate the public, raise awareness and encourage healthy eating lifestyle. The event uplifted our spirits and ignited our desires to serve and lead in our communities. It also strengthened the working relationship and future partnership between PACE and UMD. The goal for next year is to push for more senior officer involvement and encourage USPHS officers to use Maryland Day as a model to launch similar activities across all 10 HHS regions. The overwhelming community engagement suggest that Maryland Day (community engagement & education) can be adopted to all settings. Lastly, we are grateful to LCDR Abigail, USPHS mascot, who graced us with her presence and brought a little cheer throughout the dreary, rainy weather. We left the event feeling special and accomplished. I hope you join us in 2025.

LEGISLATIVE from page 2

Corps Operations and Readiness Act only has one cosponsor, Sen. Duckworth). The provisions of both bills, and especially those of S. 2297, address many of COA’s legislative goals. David, Bettilou, and I worked with Rep. Greg Landsman’s (D-OH1) office to try to get a companion bill to S. 2297 introduced in the House, but no Republicans were willing to be a cosponsor.

We then chose to advocate for the parental leave parity provision from Section 6 of S. 2297 because that was one of COA’s legislative goals that has no cost associated with it, since officers are on the payroll regardless of their leave status. Rep. Landsman joined with Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) to request an amendment to the FY 2025 NDAA to provide parental leave parity to members of the USPHS.

Reps. Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA6), Don Bacon (R-NE2) Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Stephanie Bice (R-OK5), Jill Tokuda (D-HI2), and James Moylan (D-GU) filed the parental leave amendment to the House NDAA. It was discussed in full House Armed Services Committee but ruled out of order for germaneness. The Chair said he would work with them during floor debate, but when the Rules Committee reviewed the amendment, the amendment was not approved for floor consideration. COA staffer Bill McCabe shepherded the approval of a “letter of the willing” from a dozen members of The Military Coalition to the leaders of the House and Senate Armed Services Committee expressing the support of COA and the other organizations for the amendment.

Bettilou and I are now working on two fronts to have the parental leave amendment included in the House and or Senate Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations bill for FY’25. Additionally, we are working with Senator Duckworth’s office to have her offer the amendment on the Senate floor when the NDAA is debated. We are also working with several other members of the Armed Services Committee to garner their support for the amendment.

In summary, it was a busy but very frustrating year advocating for COA’s priorities. But we have a long way to go before legislation is completed and the 118th Congress adjourns in December. We have a new software tool available to help you show support for our efforts. It has been my pleasure and honor to have served as the Chair of the Legislative Affairs Committee.
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Recap of a Day Spent Supporting VADM Vivek Murthy, Surgeon General of the United States

by LTJG Leighland Feinman, PhD

In late April, I responded to a social media post from LT Jamla Rizek, calling for New York City-based officers for a "unique detail." Despite the current strategic pause status of Ready Reserve operations, we are still officers who wish to contribute and I wanted to take any opportunity to be visible on behalf of our Corps and the Ready Reserve Component. What I expected—a ceremonial event of some kind—was quite different from the reality. I was asked to serve as staff and driver for Surgeon General of the United States, VADM Vivek Murthy, for a day.

Due to the current funding situation of the Ready Reserve component, it was not possible for me to receive orders for pay, but considering the opportunity, I was happy to volunteer for unpaid orders for training points.

This single-day detail required advance planning with the Surgeon General's office. The week prior, I had a meeting with his team to review the agenda and logistics. The day prior, I met his Director of Advance Planning in New York City to collect a rental car and drive the route we’d be following to check transit times and identify a café to use as a between-event work site. Working with this team was a sincere pleasure—they were extremely professional, passionate about the Surgeon General’s priorities, and handled all the logistics. They also made sure to plan a lot of extra time into the schedule, which served us well.

On the day, we had three engagements: a conversation between VADM Murthy and Selena Gomez about Mental Health at the Rare Beauty summit, an interview with the New York Times, and a panel discussion about Asian American mental health at The Asia Society.

On the way to our first event, VADM Murthy conducted engagement prep and chatted with us from the back of the car. A relative of his went to college in my neighborhood, so we swapped local café and pizza recommendations. This set a tone for the day—we were able to interact in a casual, professional way while maintaining appropriate customs and courtesies and getting work done.

Time between events offered an opportunity to understand who VADM Murthy is and how he works. He was extremely focused, but also sociable with his team, and at one point insisted on getting us an oversized cookie to share. I took some mental notes on how to lead a team effectively without piling on pressure. He also took time for conversation with me about his appreciation for a recent deployment as well as for photos. That showed his investment in our Corps and its missions and was a highlight of the day for me.

The experience also made me think about what it is to publicly appear in uniform with a well-known, also uniformed government official. That same week in New York, there was a rash of protests that made national news. We had to consider what to do if protestors appeared at any of our events. For example, we chose to walk to the New York Times interview. This took us through the Times Square neighborhood on foot, a place where nearly anything can happen, and our uniforms drew attention. This went without incident, but there were unique force protection considerations.

I joined the audience for the Asia Society event and got to assist VADM Murthy’s full-time staff on his photo line afterwards. I didn’t anticipate how affecting his remarks on the dangers of social media would be for me. I made some big changes to how I use social media platforms after hearing his point that no social media company has released any safety data on their platforms’ use, despite the efforts they put towards influencing user behavior.

To end the day, we returned to the airport, and on the ride back, VADM Murthy listened to and engaged with me on a conversation about the challenges that we face regarding the future of the Ready Reserve Corps. I was extremely impressed with his candor and personal investment in the Ready Reserve. I was also touched by his respect for and interest in my perspectives despite the differences in our seniority.

We also listened to some music—nearly everyone in the car was a Taylor Swift fan.

I came away from the experience with deep appreciation for why we wear the uniform and the impacts that it can have promoting public health. I also learned a lot about the challenges that go into running the Office of the Surgeon General, and the deep passion for that work that perfuses that office at all levels.
Addressing the Unique Needs of Commissioned Corps Officers

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COA Survivor Assistance Checklist From the COA Retired Officers Committee

By the Commissioned Officers Association Retired Officer Committee

Are you prepared? – What’s in your “when-I-go” bag?

If you’re one of those who keeps a week’s supply of food and water around, who insures that you have an emergency kit at home and in the trunk of your car, if you have given thought to or organized what you need to take with you when there is an imminent need to evacuate your home, then the recently published COA Survivor Assistance Checklist is made for you.

We’ve all heard about the importance of “getting one’s affairs in order” to include having a will and medical power-of-attorney prepared. But there are other important things that should be done before you are no longer able to manage your affairs.

For whomever will be handling your affairs when you pass away, the COA Survivor Assistance Checklist provides both critical information about immediate actions that your spouse, family members, or others will need as well as details about all the important documents.

It’s organized in an easy to complete format that includes:

• Immediate actions to taken (with contact numbers and email addresses)
• Personal information
• Service information
• Benefits (Social Security, Veterans Affairs, insurance)
• Financials (investments, mortgage, banking, loans, credit cards, retirement/annuity accounts, CDs)
• Medical/Dental provider contact information
• Location of critical information
• Who should be notified (persons, organizations)
• Interment information

If you’ve ever handled the affairs of a deceased parent, you know what it’s like trying to “find stuff” during an emotional and difficult time. What a great gift to your survivors to have all the information they’ll need in one place to manage your affairs efficiently and effectively when you are no longer there to do it yourself. This checklist should be considered a ‘living’ document -- if there are changes in the information within any of the above-mentioned categories, changes should be made in the document. You can do this digitally or in a written form. The guidance that you leave for your survivors should reflect the most recent information on all your accounts, will, loans, etc.

Retired COA officers received the checklist in the mail thanks to a generous donation from CAPT Patricia Mail, USPHS (retired), who donated the finances necessary for these mailings. If you didn’t receive it in the mail, you can find it, as well as other valuable information, in the Retired Officers section of the COA website at www.coausphs.org.

Being pre-emptive also includes thinking posthumously.

So take a look and get out a pencil. It’s worth the effort.

THERAPISTS from page 5

advanced, occupational therapists became integral members of interdisciplinary teams, offering holistic interventions to address both the physical and mental aspects of recovery.

Today, occupational therapy practitioners stand as a vital component of mental health treatment teams, providing specialized interventions to enhance individuals’ overall well-being and functional independence. The goal of occupational therapy is to establish, restore, maintain, and improve function and quality of life through participation in occupations, or life activities in which individuals, groups, or populations engage in that bring meaning or purpose to their lives. Occupational therapy practitioners provide a unique perspective and holistic lens of practice that complements other disciplines and enhances treatment of mental health conditions. The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) continues to advocate for the integration of occupational therapy services in mental health treatment in various organizations that address mental health concerns across the lifespan.

The past two decades have seen noticeable efforts towards the advancement of mental health issues by organizations such as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to foster understanding and increase services for psychological disorders. Most notably, the passing of the Affordable Care Act, the Mental Health Parity and Addition Equity Act of 2008, the Garrett Lee Smith State/Tribal Suicide Prevention Program, and the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant, which provides financial assistance to states to offer community based mental health services. With more work to be done, Mental Health Awareness month acts as an integral piece for advocacy in the field of mental health. Throughout the month of May and beyond, SAMHSA, The National Alliance on Mental Illness, The National Council for Mental Wellbeing, as well as other organizations, offer free resources and information to anyone in need.
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New Patient Resources Section on TRICARE Website

by The Military Health System and Defense Health Agency
Communications and Public Affairs Division

Are you looking for information and tools to help manage your health care and TRICARE benefit? Check out the new Patient Resources section on tricare.mil. This section makes it easy to find forms, track your health records, learn about disaster alerts, and more. Read on for an overview of what you can find in the Patient Resources section.

Claims
In the Filing Claims section, you can learn when and how to file medical, pharmacy, and dental claims. As noted in the TRICARE Choices in the United States Handbook, you may need to file your own claim to be reimbursed if you get care from a non-network provider. TRICARE will reimburse you for covered services at the TRICARE allowable amount. This amount won’t include any copayments, cost-shares, or deductibles.

Forms
Need to find a form? The Download a Form section has many commonly used forms, including forms for:

- Enrolling and disenrolling in a TRICARE health or dental plan
- Requesting pre-authorization or medical necessity
- Requesting reimbursement through the Prime Travel Benefit
- Filing grievances and submitting appeals

Contact us
Do you need help or have questions about your TRICARE benefits? Go to the Contact Us section. You can click “Call Us,” to find the right phone number for what you need. You can also find information on where to log in to secure services and addresses for sending claims. This makes it easy for you to get in touch with the right people to answer your questions or respond to your concerns.

MHS Customer Service Community Directory
Are you looking for contact information for your military hospital? Check out the Military Health System Customer Service Community Directory. You can use this directory to find patient advocates, beneficiary counseling coordinators, and debt collection assistance officers.

Health Records
Looking for information on your health records? Check out the My Military Health Records section, which includes a gateway to the MHS GENESIS Patient Portal. MHS GENESIS is the Military Health System’s electronic health record.

The Patient Resources section also has information on:

- Disaster Resources: Get health alerts and learn how to manage your health benefits before, during, and after a disaster.

• TRICARE Multimedia Center: Check out TRICARE news, videos, webinars, and podcasts.
• Patient Rights and Responsibilities: Learn about your rights and responsibilities as a TRICARE beneficiary and patient in the Military Health System.

How to find the Patient Resources section
It’s easy to get to the Patient Resources section in just a few clicks or taps.

On a computer, click “Patient Resources” on the blue navigation bar. This navigation bar is located across the top of most tricare.mil pages.

On a smartphone, tap the three horizontal lines located in the top left corner of most tricare.mil pages. This opens the navigation menu. Then tap “Patient Resources.”

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CAPT (Ret.) Gordon Aird
Mesa, AZ - Deacon Gordon R. Aird, 85, a career pharmacist in the U.S. Public Health Service, passed away on May 28, 2024. Born in Whiting, Indiana, he graduated from Purdue University with a degree in Pharmacy. He received a Master's in Health Care Administration from the University of Minnesota.

He served in the U.S. Army Reserve prior to his commission with the US Public Health Service. Gordon spent most of his career as a health care administrator in the Indian Health Service supporting the health of American Indians and Alaskan Natives. After retirement, he went on to have a second career as a Hospital Administrator for Presbyterian Healthcare Services in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Gordon was ordained as a Deacon in the Catholic Church on May 28, 1977, and actively served in that role through 2022. He is survived by his wife of 58 years, Lillian, and 4 children, Cynthia (Henry), Bobbi (Todd), Stephanie, and Robert and his seven grandchildren.

CAPT (Ret.) James Buchtel
Baton Rouge, LA - James Robert “Jim” Buchtel was called to his eternal rest on January 20, 2024, at the age of 86. He was born on April 8, 1937, in Canton, Ohio. Jim dedicated his professional life to serving others as a Civil Engineer for the US Public Health Service at Carville Hansons Disease Center and the Department of Environmental Quality. His service as a Captain in the Public Health Service, from 1960 to 1980, reflected his respect for all of creation and his commitment to public well-being. An alumnus of The Ohio State University, where he earned a BCE, Jim’s quest for knowledge was matched by his passion for model railroading with the Anaconda Model Railroaders. Jim was a cherished husband to his wife Virginia (Jenny) Buchtel and a guiding light to his children: Lisa Buchtel Gehring, Ginger Wilson Lowe, Jason Buchtel, Joseph Wilson, Paul Wilson, and Michael Wilson.
Greater Los Angeles COA and SoCal COA Branches Partner to Represent the USPHS Commissioned Corps at the California HOSA State Leadership Conference

by LT Juan Martinez, Greater Los Angeles COA Branch and co-authored by LCDR Rumany Penn, SoCal COA Branch President; LT Claire Tipton, Greater Los Angeles COA Branch President; and LT Pearl Ozuruigbo, SoCal COA Branch

The United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps seeks to inspire and educate the next generation of public health leaders through education, partnership, and collaboration, including with student organizations. One outstanding organization, The Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA), empowers students to become leaders in the global health community through education, collaboration, and hands-on experience. As Commissioned Corps Officers, it is vital we promote awareness of our fulfilling career path and public health mission through community outreach events. HOSA's mission overlaps nicely with the USPHS, as they focus on preparing, supporting, and empowering youth to pursue career opportunities in health industries, with the goal of enhancing delivery of quality healthcare to all people.

Considering the significant number of HOSA members—over 260,000 members across 54 chartered HOSA Associations, American Samoa, Canada, China, District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico—the Greater Los Angeles COA Branch and SoCal COA Branch collaborated to form a team of dedicated officers to capitalize on outreach at the 2024 California HOSA (Cal-HOSA) State Leadership Conference (SLC) in Anaheim, CA, on April 5, 2024.

The 2024 SLC, held at the Hilton Hotel in Anaheim, CA, drew approximately 4,000 students from diverse academic backgrounds in addition to students’ families, teachers, principals, advisors, and administrative staff. Representatives from several healthcare companies and health agencies attended the conference. An inter-category team of seven officers proudly represented the USPHS and COA at the SLC by conducting a workshop recruitment presentation to the students on USPHS careers, judging student competitions, and staffing a booth in the conference College and Career Expo. Greater Los Angeles COA Branch members included LT Jamie Williams, LT Olubukola Banmeke, and LT Juan Martinez; and SoCal COA Branch members included LT Pearl Ozuruigbo, LT Grace Santos, LT Bryan Galvez, and LT Heidy Perales. The planning co-leads included LCDR Rumany Penn (President, SoCal COA), LT Claire Tipton (President, Greater Los Angeles COA), and LT Ozuruigbo, our very own HOSA graduate. The volunteers’ collective goal was to emphasize the fulfilling ability to protect and promote public health through a career with USPHS. Officers also utilized the opportunity to educate attendees on the diverse roles and responsibilities within USPHS.

Over 400 students and attendees visited our booth and were interested in the unique opportunity to serve our nation through the USPHS Commissioned Corps. Engaging future public health leaders and the next generation at the event proved to be effective, given the large number of individuals who were interested. Many of the high school students asked officers for advice and their personal experiences, which focused on the rigors of attending college and succeeding in graduate programs. Within the first hour, the USPHS exhibition booth ran out of promotional materials. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration mug (donated by LCDR Penn) and the USPHS Invisible Corps challenge coin (graciously donated by RADM (Ret) Pamela Schweitzer) were raffled off to the students and to the teachers.

Concurrently, LT Jamie Williams and LT Grace Santos presented to over 20 conference attendees on careers with the USPHS Commissioned Corps. The presentation was highly received and generated informative and inspiring Q&A. Furthermore, LT Olubukola Banmeke and LT Heidy Perales served as Judges for the SLC student competitions, evaluating 24 student projects in the Forensic Sciences and Extraneous Health Policy Writing categories. In addition, prior to the start of the conference, LT Pearl Ozuruigbo pre-judged 51 student competition entries over five categories.

Ultimately, the Cal-HOSA State Leadership Conference was a success, especially since Greater Los Angeles COA and SoCal COA Branches made it a priority to attend this event and engage with all attendees, and regardless of academic discipline. It was an added success as many attendees had never even heard of the USPHS. This event was both professionally and personally fulfilling to volunteers and helped the USPHS Commissioned Corps in its greater mission to promote public health and engage and inspire the next generation of public health leaders. We’ve been invited back to future Cal-HOSA events, and look forward to attending, continuing to build local and state partnerships, and serving our nation.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR from page 1
proclamation which was presented to
Admiral Rachel Levine.

PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS: The U.S. Public Health Service
(USPHS) Commissioned Corps, stands as
one of the nation’s eight uniformed services,
composed of thousands of dedicated public
health professionals whose mission is to
protect, promote, and advance the health
and safety of the United States; and

WHEREAS: The USPHS Commissioned
Corps officers fulfill critical roles in federal
agencies, responding to public health
emergencies, conducting pivotal medical
research, providing direct healthcare
services, and implementing disease
prevention programs; and

WHEREAS: These officers, under the
guidance of the Surgeon General, have been
essential in addressing public health crises,
including natural disasters, pandemics,
and other emergencies, showcasing their
unwavering commitment and bravery; and

WHEREAS: The USPHS Commissioned
Corps aligns closely with the City of
Jacksonville’s priorities, including enhancing
physical and mental health, addressing
maternal and infant health outcomes,
improving public safety and literacy, and
building a more resilient and sustainable
city that is prepared for changing climate, and

WHEREAS: The dedication, expertise, and
compassion of USPHS Commissioned
Corps officers exemplify the highest
standards of public service, notably
benefiting our communities and the nation as
a whole, and

WHEREAS: It is crucial to recognize the
invaluable contributions and sacrifices of
USPHS Commissioned Corps officers
who serve honorably and inspire continued
excellence in public health initiatives.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Donna Deegan,
by virtue of the authority vested in me as
mayor of Jacksonville, Florida, do hereby
proclaim June 25, 2024, as U.S. PUBLIC
HEALTH SERVICE COMMISSIONED
CORPS RECOGNITION DAY in Jacksonville,
and encourage all citizens to join me in
recognizing the outstanding efforts of the
USPHS Commissioned Corps and to show
appreciation for their dedicated commitment
to enhancing public health and safety.

IN WITNESS THEREOF, this 25th day of
June, in the year Two Thousand and Twenty-
Four. Signed, Donna Deegan, Mayor

It was my pleasure to draft this proclamation
and I was proud to hear my hometown
mayor bestow this honor to officers. In the
August edition of Frontline, you will hear
more about the wildly successful 2024
symposium. I look forward to seeing many
of you in Albuquerque, June 9-12, 2025, for
the 58th Annual USPHS Scientific & Training
Symposium. Until then!
PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation

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We Welcome New Members of COA, May 1 - June 30, 2024

LT Scott Adamson, NM
Ms. Kathryn Butler-Hodge, VA
LT Daniel Chang, OK
LT Richard Evoy, CO
LT Felicia Flynch, TX
LT Marques Forbes, TX
LT Jacqueline Garcia, FL
LCDR Max Klingenstein, AK
LT Nicole Lyons, NC
Ms Chiara Rodriguez, TX
LT Lily Yuan, NY

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6. Creating a Future as Noble as Our Past – it's working.
COF was established in June 2000 to provide support for public health professionals nationwide, to support USPHS Commissioned Corps Officers in their professional development, and to sustain USPHS into the future. In the past 24 years, we have contributed to the nation’s health. As we look to the future there is much work to be done, but we have a solid foundation to build on.

7. Donate. The work of the COF continues through your generous donations. Since 2000, COF has provided millions of dollars in scholarships, educational grants, and fellowships to USPHS officers and their family members. Without your support, our training, leadership symposiums, and other noteworthy initiatives that advance public health would not be possible. Call it a legacy investment or a chance to give back - our officers are amazing.

8. COF Trustees. Our past, honorary, and current Trustees continue to serve without fanfare for the sole purpose of advancing public health for the nation and the world.

9. Leadership and Mentorship are the keys to success for the populations we serve and how we need to take care of and serve each other. The road of leadership can be challenging and lonely, but if you have mentors along the journey – it is much easier.

10. Officers Always –Lifetime Commitment to Public Health and COA/COF. The future of COA/COF belongs to you. With your support, our organizations can continue to build a strong future. It is with your help via donations, serving on committees, attending training symposiums, mentoring, and recruiting new members that we can continue to grow and add value for a stronger Corps.

On a Personal Note: Thank you for your service and remember to always lead with courage and passion for the Corps, COA, and COF!