

## COA Participates in 157th Annual National Memorial Day Observance



RDML Emil Wang, LT Jason Slavoski, and Mrs. Kelly Slavoski with COA's wreath just before laying at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

by CDR Cynthia Chennault and LCDR Jennifer Jabara

Officers CDR Cynthia Chennault and LCDR Jennifer Jabara were honored to represent the Commissioned Officers Association (COA) of the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) for Memorial Day at Arlington National Cemetery on Monday, May 26, 2025. Memorial Day is an exceptionally special time of year that honors our nation's fallen service members. It's a solemn day of remembrance, a dedicated time to reflect on the cost of the freedoms we cherish as a country. It was a beautiful day, with "The President's Own" United States Marine Band and the U.S. Navy Band "Sea Chanters" performing familiar

patriotic pieces such as "God Bless America" and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," concluding with our national anthem. The President, Vice-President, Secretary of Defense, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were all in attendance and offered meaningful remarks honoring our very best, those who paid the ultimate price that we may live in the land of the free. The ceremony concluded with an individual wreath laying at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. RDML Emil Wang, 15th Engineer Chief Professional Officer, and LT Jason Slavoski, USPHS Ready Reservist, laid a wreath on behalf of COA.

CDR Cynthia Chennault reflects, "It was a day of remembrance and such a  
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from the  
Executive  
Director



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

I received an interesting request several weeks ago from two officers who asked if the Commissioned Officers Association (COA) could assist in socializing an idea to the Commissioned Corps Headquarters (CCHQ) Director and the Deputy Surgeon General (DSG). Their idea is for the Office of the Surgeon General (OSG) to offer a reprieve to officers who are eligible for promotion during the upcoming cycle that would not count against their past or future waiver request(s). If approved, officers who choose to opt out for this exception year would still submit their Commissioned Officers' Effectiveness Report (COER) along with the reason they are requesting to opt out with no penalty. Officers who want to submit a promotion package can do so, but those who perceive their growth opportunities were impeded this year due to circumstances beyond their control would have the option to not submit, without penalty. Examples of circumstances listed are listed below.

- Closing of divisions and offices due to Department of

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# COA Member Benefits

## Capitol Hill Representation

Efforts on Capitol Hill continually support all Commissioned Corps officers – active, former, reserve, and retired

## Local Representation

COA Local Branches provide venues for meeting fellow officers and a forum for the discussion of issues within the Commissioned Corps

## Newsletter

Newsletter reports on monthly activities and items of interest of COA and the USPHS Commissioned Corps

## Ribbon

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

## Insurance Programs

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

## USF Online Programs

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50 percent discount for the online MPH and certificate programs

## Scholarship Programs

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

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## Legislative Update

by LT Evan Williams, PharmD, MBA, BCPS, BCACP, Chair of Legislative Affairs Committee

This marks my final legislative update as I conclude my term serving as the Ready Reserve Representative on the COA Board of Directors. It has been an honor to represent my fellow reservists and advocate on their behalf, as well as to serve the broader USPHS community, including active-duty officers, veterans, and their families. I am also grateful for the opportunity to have led the COA Legislative Affairs Committee, working alongside committed individuals striving to advance the interests of the Commissioned Corps on Capitol Hill.

At the time of writing, Congress remains deeply engaged in negotiations related to federal budgets and appropriations as the White House continues to push for action on its budget reconciliation and tax priorities. The Senate has yet to confirm several key political nominees whose roles include oversight and direction of the USPHS Commissioned Corps. These domestic matters unfold against the backdrop of renewed focus on international relations and foreign policy following recent US military actions in the Middle East. Understandably, this complex landscape has made it difficult to capture the attention of legislators on issues specific to the Commissioned Corps. Nevertheless, COA has maintained its presence on the Hill and continues to advocate persistently for officers.

Over the past year, COA's legislative priorities have focused on achieving parity with other uniformed services in

five critical areas: parental leave, Ready Reserve funding and benefits, flexible spending account (FSA) eligibility, access to childcare, and veteran's preference in federal hiring. While sponsors were identified and legislation introduced in many of these areas, I would like to focus on meaningful progress related to FSA eligibility and parental leave.

In the fall of 2024, USPHS officers gained access to Dependent Care FSAs, and Health Care FSAs will follow in the fall of 2025; accomplishments achieved largely through the efforts of CCHQ leadership. In addition, officers now have access to 12 weeks of non-chargeable parental leave, again achieved through policy changes authorized by HHS and Commissioned Corps leadership. While the parental leave authorization has not yet been codified in statute, its implementation marks real, tangible progress in the quality of life for USPHS officers.

The successes in FSA eligibility and parental leave share a common trait: bold, proactive decision-making by Commissioned Corps and Departmental leadership. These decisions to leverage authority have made direct, positive impacts on the day-to-day lives of officers. These developments also underscore the challenges we continue to face in achieving legislative progress. The reality is that limited awareness of the USPHS Commissioned Corps, the comparatively small size of the service, and the abundance of competing national priorities make legislative change inherently slow and difficult. I believe USPHS officers should be

see **LEGISLATIVE** on page 3





# Board of Directors

## Passing the Gavel, Holding the Mission

Reprinted from a COA all-member message dated June 30, 2025.

Dear COA Members, Partners, and Fellow Officers,

As I write this final letter in my role as Chair of the Board of Directors for the Commissioned Officers Association, I am filled with deep gratitude and pride. Serving as the therapist representative on the board for the past five years—four of those on the Executive Committee—has been one of the most meaningful chapters of my professional journey.

COA is a remarkable place to build Corps-wide relationships, drive impactful change, and strengthen our collective voice. Through our partnership with the Commissioned Officers Foundation, we've expanded membership benefits and deepened our advocacy efforts—all in unwavering support of the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps.

We all experience pressures in different ways, and the impact of those stressors varies from person to person. While “it depends” may not be a satisfying leadership answer on its own, it is a powerful door opener. It invites us to lean into inquiry, to ask the right questions, and to understand the “why” behind the challenge. In a world where change—especially administrative—is often beyond our control, COA remains our constant. Our grassroots strength comes from over 80 vibrant branches, and our local and national membership is pivotal to our continued advocacy on the Hill.

### LEGISLATIVE from page 2

afforded all the benefits and entitlements earned by our service; however, we must realistically consider the challenges and timelines involved in making progress legislatively.

Speaking as a reservist, it is clear that legislative action is required for certain benefits, such as securing Tricare Reserve Select eligibility. However, other challenges reservists face related to accession rank parity, seniority credit, career advancement, deployment notification timelines, deployment duration, and inclusion and leadership eligibility within SG-sponsored groups all have solutions that could be accomplished through policy interpretation and application rather than statutory change. The same concept likely holds true for some broader Corps-wide matters as well.

Policy is shaped by statute, yet there are situations where the law is silent or non-prescriptive, leaving room for a more liberal

I've had the privilege of working alongside the best of the best in the Corps. These experiences have shaped me in ways I never imagined and have left me with a profound sense of pride in our shared mission.

As I pass the gavel to CAPT Kurt Kesteloot, I do so with full confidence in his leadership and vision. I also extend my heartfelt congratulations to LCDR Mendoza-Truong as Chair-Elect and CDR Alyssa Givens as Treasurer. I look forward to serving alongside you for another year and continuing the important work we've begun.

To all of you—thank you. I am honored to remain on the COA Board and cannot fully express the depth of my gratitude. As a service, we've got this. We've got COA. And most importantly, we've got each other.

I leave you with a quote that has guided me through many moments of leadership:

“Vulnerability is not winning or losing; it's having the courage to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome.”

— Brené Brown

With respect and appreciation,

CDR Katie Jacques

Chair, Board of Directors

Commissioned Officers Association

interpretation that serves the best interests of officers. In these cases, courageous and thoughtful leadership and a willingness to apply policy in a manner that promotes fairness, morale, readiness, well-being of officers, and trust is essential. I appreciate the complexities of the current federal environment, where cautious, measured leadership is often appropriate. Still, I encourage leaders to apply their authority with an officer-centered perspective, balancing statutory compliance with maximization of benefits and opportunities for officers whenever possible.

As I conclude my service on the COA Board, I urge all officers to stay engaged, advocate for the Commissioned Corps, and support the leaders and organizations working to ensure that officers receive the recognition, benefits, and opportunities they have earned.

It has been my privilege to serve you all.



# You Spoke. We Listened.

by RADM (Ret) Kerry P. Nessler, President,  
COF Board of Trustees

Good day, esteemed fellow officers,

The COF Board of Trustees (BoT) has made significant progress this past year, especially with the Corps, officers, and veterans at the forefront of our efforts. This year has brought about notable challenges, requiring us to demonstrate resilience and adaptability. Together we have navigated unprecedented changes and urgencies, from public health trust issues to shifting government priorities and structures. Please recall that this is not new to the U.S. Public Health Service (1798) and the U.S. Commissioned Corps (1889). We have served in every administration since our inception, over 227 years. Our mission carries historical significance, and your actions have earned the respect of many. Optimism and hope continue.

As you may know, the COF Executive Board formed four committees that mimicked the COF Strategic Plan's pillars. In summary, here is a snapshot of their end-of-year accomplishments. First, chaired by RDML (Ret.) Steve Solomon, the Communications and Awareness Committee created a communications framework, contracted with a public relations firm for project-based services, and coordinated activities with the Engagement and the Veterans Committees to focus on officers both active duty and retired. Second, chaired by CAPT (Ret.)

Jim Imholte, the Collaboration Partnerships and Alignments Committee partnered with public health professionals and Schools of Public Health to address key steps forward for public health, the Corps, officers, and veterans. Third, chaired by CDR (Ret.) Harlem Gunness, the Engagement Committee conducted three Invisible Corps screenings, and will pilot a 'buddy' program to pair the BoT with officers. And fourth, chaired by RDML (Ret.) Paul Seligman, the Education and Training Committee, completed a 5-year cycle of Seed Grant Programs, providing a total of \$736k to communities focused on the Surgeon General's priorities. Overall, in FY 24-25 this Committee provided \$187k to fund grants and scholarships to communities, officers, and their families.

COF's future is centered on "You Spoke. We Listened." In December 2023, a survey was conducted for USPHS officers on their opinions of the PHS COF programs. From that survey, it was noted that there is strong support for the current scholarship and fellowship programs, as well as COF sponsorship of junior officers to attend the annual symposium. At the COF Strategic Planning meeting in January 2024, the survey results were reviewed, and a new strategic goal was identified to explore additional ways that the COF could support the educational, leadership, and readiness needs of officers. At this year's annual BoT meeting in June 2025, those initiatives were highlighted and expanded for the

FY 25-26 strategic plan. Programs that will continue to provide financial support are the Family Member Scholarships, the RDML Mishoe "Believe" scholarships, the RADM Michael Fellowship at the University of Maryland, the Daisy Impact award, the USPHS Mascot Abigail, the sponsorship of junior officers at the annual Symposium, the support of Category Day at the annual Symposium, and local Commissioned Officer Association (COA) branch support. To expand on the outreach efforts of the COF, the following initiatives are being enhanced or added:

## **Certificate in Public Health**

This year, COF formalized an agreement with the National Board of Public Health Examiners to cover the costs of offering its Certificate in Public Health (CPH) examination for 80 officers annually. In 2025, 76 officers applied and will receive funding to take the exam by December 31st. We look forward to offering this opportunity to another 80 COA members in the fall.

## **Georgetown Congressional Operations Seminar**

COF will fund the tuition, lodging, and travel for six officers (active duty, Ready Reserve, and Veterans) to attend this four-day course in Washington, DC. The course provides information on congressional processes and organization, while detailing how Congress interacts with departments in

see **COF** on page 5

# RADM (Retired) Richard M. Church receives Health System Pharmacists' Highest Honor

by Rear Admiral (Retired) Pamela Schweitzer, Pharm.D., Former Assistant Surgeon General

On June 10, 2025, a few of us had the privilege to attend the 2025 ASHP Pharmacy Futures meeting in Charlotte, North Carolina, where RADM (Retired) Richard M. Church was honored with the highest accolade bestowed by the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) – the Harvey A.K. Whitney Lecture award (<https://harveywhitney.org/>).

This award, now in its 75th year, recognizes individuals of high moral character, good citizenship, and elevated professional ideals who have made significant contributions to health-system pharmacy. Recipients are honored for sustained exemplary service, an outstanding single achievement, or a combination of accomplishments that benefit both the profession and public health.

RADM Church joins a distinguished legacy of pharmacy leaders, including two other

USPHS Commissioned Corps pharmacists who previously received the award:

1956 – George F. Archambault

1978 – Allen J. Brands

Church delivered a powerful and thought-provoking message about the Native American 7th generation principle, which teaches that the decisions we make should consider how it will affect our descendants seven generations in the future. His message encouraged us to think beyond the present and to consider the long-term impact of leadership, policies, and practices on patients, communities, and the profession.

Many of us have had the opportunity to work with RADM Church during his 41-year career in the Indian Health Service, including his tenure as PHS Chief Professional Officer (CPO) for the Pharmacy Category. The entire pharmacy profession has benefited from his leadership in advancing pharmacist-provided primary care (pharmacy practitioner program), developing IHS patient counseling techniques, and



RADM Richard M. Church

codifying the IHS Standards of Practice, a professional philosophy and processes employed by IHS pharmacists.

It was an honor to witness this well-deserved recognition and to celebrate the legacy of a leader who has shaped the future of pharmacy for generations to come.

## COF from page 4

the executive branch. Details regarding eligibility and how to apply for these opportunities will be forthcoming. More information on the program can be found at, <https://gai.georgetown.edu/?p=440>.

## Local COA Branch Support

COF has allocated a definitive amount of money to this effort and encourages local COA branches to apply for funding to support local, community-based initiatives. Again, details regarding eligibility and how to apply for these opportunities will be forthcoming. Information on local branch funding requests can be found at, <https://www.phscof.org/scholarships-grants-and-funding-requests/phs-and-coa-local-branch-requests/>.

As my term comes to an end, it has been my distinct honor and privilege to serve as your COF President for the FY 24-25. Thank you, officers and retirees, for your inspiration, guidance, and hope for public health's future. Your COA/COF membership and donations bring much value to the sustainability and growth of public health. And a big shout out to COF's remarkable Executive Director, CAPT (Ret.) Jacqueline Rychnovsky and her stellar staff. None of this



The Commissioned Officers Foundation (COF) Board of Trustees and COF staff at this year's annual board meeting in June.

would be possible without her outstanding leadership. It gives me great pleasure to pass the President's gavel to our distinguished and brilliant President-Elect RDML (Ret.) Steve Soloman, an officer and a gentleman. He has been an instrumental leader on the Executive Committee and Chair of the essential Communications and Awareness Committee. He was my saving grace. His strength, knowledge, and kind soul will continue to gallantly guide us through COF's strategic plan moving forward, onward, and upward together. Be well.

# ANNUAL

## COA BUSINESS MEETING AND AWARDS CEREMONY

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# Celebrating the U.S. Public Health Service's Birthday

by Jasmine Stuart, COA Director of External and Legislative Affairs

Here at COA, we're reflecting on the incredible legacy of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps (USPHSCC) as we prepare to celebrate the 227th birthday of the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS). While the USPHSCC officially became one of the eight uniformed services on January 4, 1889, the origins of the USPHS date back to July 16, 1798, when President John Adams signed legislation creating the Marine Hospital Fund to care for sick and disabled seamen, a foundational moment that would eventually evolve into the USPHS that we know today.

For over two centuries, the USPHS has been on the front lines of our nation's most pressing public health challenges, and the birthday celebration is a terrific time to showcase all of the great work that the USPHSCC does and continues to do for our nation.

This year, COA members across the country can help celebrate the USPHS birthday not just with pride but with purpose. We're encouraging local branches to host picnics and other celebrations during the month of July and extend invites to their elected officials and community leaders. Hosting a birthday event is an excellent way to increase awareness and share what it means to serve in the USPHSCC.

We're also urging members to take advantage of the upcoming Congressional recess in August by scheduling visits with their Members of Congress or members of their staff in local district offices and attending any scheduled town halls. Engaging directly with legislators helps build awareness of the Corps' mission and contributions, especially when connected to a milestone like the USPHS birthday. Helpful tips for engaging with your elected officials can be found in the [COA Legislative Advocacy Guide](#), and




Deputy Surgeon General RADM Denise Hinton and COA Director of External and Legislative Affairs Jasmine Stuart celebrate the 227th USPHS birthday at the USPHS Commissioned Corps Family Day Picnic.

a list of COA's legislative priorities for the 119th Congress can be found [here](#). The COA government affairs team is also happy to guide you through the advocacy process.

As COA continues to work to increase USPHSCC visibility on the national stage and advocate for the priorities that matter most to our officers, we ask that you make your voice heard. Whether you're meeting with a Representative, attending a town hall, or simply sharing your story, the USPHS birthday is a chance to honor the past while shaping the future of the USPHSCC.


Let us know how you plan to celebrate! We would love to share your efforts and help amplify your voice. Please reach out to [advocacy@coausphs.org](mailto:advocacy@coausphs.org) with any questions.



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# Surgeon Samuel J. Call and the Overland Relief Expedition

by CDR (Ret.) Lanardo E. Moody, MA, MS

This true story is about an exceptional USPHS Medical Officer serving in the U. S. Revenue Cutter Service (USRCS)—a forerunner of the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG)—who completed a 1,500-mile journey in Alaska to help whalers who were trapped in ice during the harsh 1897-1898 winter. PHS officers have been assigned to the USCG and its forerunners—often aboard cutters—since the early 1870s. Medical, dental, engineer, and nurse officers have served the USCG and other services with many injured and some losing their lives.

The people who are referred to as Eskimos—generally as Inuit or Yupik—hunted whales in the Arctic Ocean for centuries. Businesses from around the world sought baleen—sometimes called “whalebone,” although it is not bone, to make profitable products. Baleen whales do not have teeth and use it to collect shrimp-like krill, plankton and small fish. Whale oil and baleen were highly valued in Europe and America. Manufacturers used whale oil in cooking, lamps, and other products. Baleen was used in women’s clothing. Because of the difficulty acquiring whales in the Atlantic, the American whaling fleet expanded to the Arctic.

In the fall of 1897, eight whaling vessels became trapped in ice near Point Barrow, Alaska. Unfortunately, almost 300 men were aboard! The concern was that these men would starve. A plan was developed to deliver several hundred reindeer as food. President McKinley authorized CAPT Francis Tuttle of the Revenue Cutter Bear to lead a rescue team led by Executive Officer 1st LT David Henry Jarvis and included 2nd LT Ellsworth Bertholf and PHS Surgeon Samuel J. Call. Departing on November 27, 1897, the rescue mission became known as the Overland Relief Expedition.

Samuel Johnson Call, born in Missouri in 1858, grew up in California and received his medical degree from Cooper Medical College in San Francisco, a predecessor to Stanford Medicine. In his early twenties, he served in the Alaska Commercial Company (ACC). He traveled and met many in the USRCS including the famous black officer CAPT Michael A. Healy. Interestingly, black whalers were some of the earliest Americans to reach Alaska. Whaling in the 19th century was one of the most ethnically diverse industries in the country. Call left the ACC in 1890, was commissioned in the U.S. Public Health Service and assigned to the sail-and steam-powered USRC Bear in 1891. It was commanded by Healy until 1895.

Because the wooden cutter Bear was unable to push through the thick ice, CAPT Tuttle had to put the rescuers ashore at Cape Vancouver, Alaska. The unprecedented rescue began on December 16, 1897, with dog- and reindeer- pulled sleds, and men on snowshoes. The 1,500-mile trek included many



*Dr. Samuel J. Call*

harrowing experiences in the frigid weather. The team arrived on March 29, 1898, with almost 400 reindeer to Point Barrow. Many deer were emaciated and no longer a food source which was a sign of how grueling the journey had been. There was no loss of human lives related to the trek itself. Native Alaskan herders and guides Charlie Antisarlook and his wife Mary, who could speak Inupiaq, Russian, and English, and herder William T. Lopp, the superintendent of the Teller Whaling Station, were invaluable to the mission. Since Charles D. Brower--superintendent of the Cape Smythe Whaling and Training Company--helped the whalers with food and shelter, the situation of these men was not as dire as initially feared. Call was the self-appointed cook for the Expedition and primary photographer too. His medical services were in constant demand, and he helped everyone—natives included. He treated frostbite, scurvy, snow blindness, influenza, sunburn, and other conditions.

President McKinley authorized Jarvis, Bertholf, and Call to receive a specially struck Congressional Gold Medal. Call later resigned his commission in 1899 and set up private practice in Nome, Alaska. The discovery of gold caused this tiny town to swell into a city of about 20,000. Call remained four years in private practice and served as the community health officer. He later embarks on another perilous journey to aid an aged Catholic priest, Father Aloysius Jacquet, at Holy Cross—a 1,200-mile round trip! After leaving Nome, Call returned to the USRCS in 1903 serving on the Thetis and the McCulloch. He was forced to retire for health reasons in 1908 and passed away at only fifty years old in Hollister, California in 1909. His contributions epitomize the best of the officers in the USPHS and the USCG.



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# Prioritizing Your Mental Health: A Recap of the NIH Mental Health Wellness Roundtable

by LCDR Samora Casimir, OTD, OTR/L; CDR Narisa Tappitake, MOTR/L, CHT; LCDR Dan Johnson, MPH, RDN, ACSM-CEP, FAC-COR I; LT Daanish Memon, PT, DPT, OCS

In support of Mental Health Awareness Month in May, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Public Health Service (PHS) Engagement & Networking Subcommittee, led by CDR Temeri Wilder and LCDR Samora Casimir, organized and hosted a Mental Health Wellness Roundtable on Tuesday, May 13, 2025. The virtual event aimed to promote practical strategies for mental health wellness, featuring a panel of Public Health Service officers who shared their clinical perspectives on how lifestyle, environment, and daily habits impact our mental health. The seminar welcomed 67 participants from NIH and other federal agencies, providing a meaningful platform for education, discussion, and encouragement around prioritizing our mental health wellness in both personal and professional spaces.

## Speakers and Highlights

### LT Daanish Memon – NIH Physical Therapist

LT Memon highlighted the mental health benefits of regular physical activity, including reduced stress, improved mood, better sleep, enhanced self-confidence, increased social interaction, and greater cognitive function. He also shared how he implemented the Rehab Medicine Department Monthly Movement Initiative, a departmental wellness program he co-leads within the NIH Rehab Medicine Department, as a successful example of team-based physical wellness. “It was a very favorable experience to share my knowledge. I felt I was helping my colleagues manage stress and anxiety by applying my clinical expertise in exercise and the human body. I hope attendees incorporate movement into their daily lives to experience both the physical and mental benefits,” LT Memon shared.

### Ms. Rachel Sanchez – NIH Clinical Social Worker

With over a decade of clinical social work experience, Ms. Sanchez provided insight into aligning our personal values with the Eight Dimensions of Wellness (emotional, physical, social, intellectual, spiritual, vocational, environmental, and financial). She shared guidance on committing to healthy habits and sustainable actions that enhance our mental health wellness.

### LCDR Dan Johnson – NIH Dietician

LCDR Johnson, board-certified in sports dietetics and a clinical exercise physiologist with training in adult obesity management,

educated us about the significance nutrition plays for our mental health. He discussed the powerful connection between our gut and brain, highlighting how a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins—while minimizing processed foods and alcohol—can enhance mood, reduce stress, and support cognitive function. He also shed light on how the gut microbiome helps produce key neurochemicals like dopamine and serotonin which each have a positive impact on our emotions and overall mental health well-being. Conversely, a poor diet high in processed foods and refined sugars can negatively affect our mental health, potentially increasing the risk of mood disorders, causing increased inflammation, fatigue, and the potential risk of depression and anxiety. “Sleep is difficult for parents, especially new ones,” he reflected. “Recognizing sleep as essential—like medicine—is a helpful new framing.” In his unique role as the USPHS mascot handler, LCDR Johnson also emphasized the value of the human-animal bond in supporting emotional wellness.

### CDR Narisa Tappitake – Occupational Therapist and Tribal Mental Health & Wellbeing Program Manager (Bureau of Indian Affairs, Dept. of Interior)

CDR Tappitake emphasized the importance of mindfulness as a low-cost, accessible mental health wellness strategy. She introduced several easy-to-implement techniques, including mindful (slow) breathing, walking, prayer or meditation, yoga, journaling, and sensory-focused practices. All of these can be incorporated into our daily life activities, even at our workspace to help lower blood pressure, decrease high-stress levels, promote self-compassion, and enhance our overall well-being. “I always enjoy sharing about mindfulness; it is an easy self-care and reflection strategy,” she noted. “It offers stress-reducing benefits at many levels. When self-care aligns with personal values, people are more motivated to sustain these wellness habits.”

## Participant Feedback

Overall, the virtual session received overwhelmingly positive feedback from attendees, who appreciated the diversity of perspectives and actionable tips shared by the panelists. The event highlighted the importance of fostering a culture of mental health awareness throughout the federal workforce.

### References:

Stoewen D. L. (2017). Dimensions of wellness: Change your habits, change your life. *The Canadian veterinary journal = La revue Veterinaire Canadienne*, 58(8), 861–862.

# Celebrating Service and Leadership: Honoring USPHS Nurses During National Nurses Week 2025

by RDML Jennifer Moon, Chief Nurse Officer and CDR Carissa Haney, Executive Assistant to the Chief Nurse Officer

In recognition of National Nurses Week 2025, the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps honored the legacy, leadership, and continued impact of its nursing professionals during a landmark event held on May 6, 2025, at the Hubert H. Humphrey Building in Washington, D.C.

This special occasion brought together Commissioned Corps officers, leadership, family, and friends to celebrate the pivotal contributions of the thirteen Chief Nurse Officers (CNOs) who have served in this esteemed role since its inception in 1949. Appointed by the U.S. Surgeon General, the Chief Nurse Officer is the highest-ranking nurse in the USPHS Commissioned Corps and serves as the principal advisor on nursing issues—advocating for more than 1,500 active-duty nurses serving in a range of critical assignments worldwide.

A highlight of the ceremony was the unveiling of official portraits honoring each of the thirteen CNOs. These portraits, now on permanent display at the Hubert H. Humphrey Building, stand as a tribute to their enduring leadership, vision, and advocacy on behalf of the nursing profession and the communities they serve. Each CNO was also given a medallion with the USPHS Nurse Category symbol and their engraved dates of service as CNO on the back as a token and memory of their service.

In addition to celebrating past leadership, the event looked toward the future with the unveiling of the USPHS Nurse Creed—a newly developed declaration that captures the values, mission, and professional identity of Commissioned Corps nurse officers. The creed is intended to serve as both an affirmation and inspiration of hope, connecting officers to a proud legacy while guiding the next generation of nurse leaders. The USPHS Nurse Creed was written by



Chief Nurse Officer Portraits, HHS Humphrey Building, Room 742G



Chief Nurse Officers (left to right) and Deputy Surgeon General: RADM Julia Plotnick, RADM Mary Pat Couig, RADM Carol Romano, RADM Kerry Nesseler, RADM Susan Orsega, RDML Aisha Brooks, Deputy Surgeon General RADM Denise Hinton, RDML Jennifer Moon

LCDR Jeffrey Benzmilller, stationed at the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium in Anchorage, AK, who was presented with the Chief Nurse Officer (CNO) Award by RDML Jennifer Moon at the ceremony.

As the Commissioned Corps continues to confront emerging health challenges

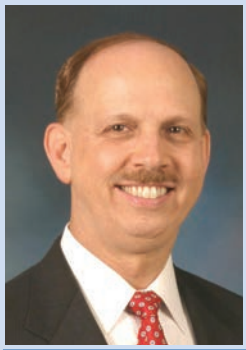
at home and abroad, the contributions of its nursing professionals remain essential to mission readiness and national public health. Events like this serve not only to honor the past but to reaffirm our collective commitment to leadership, service, and the enduring power of the nursing profession.

**MEMORIAL DAY** from page 1

privilege to participate in the parading of the flags representing COA and understanding the dedication COA has in honoring our nation's fallen by understanding who they are and what they fought for. Let us remember, let us honor, and let us never forget the ultimate price that was paid for our freedom." LCDR Jennifer Jabara reflects, "Arlington National Cemetery is our nation's most hallowed ground. It is an honor beyond measure to have had the opportunity to honor those who paid with their lives so that my children and I can enjoy the freedoms we hold dear. Following the ceremony, I had the opportunity to place roses on the graves and spend time with families of those who lay in eternal rest in Arlington. As I looked out at the rows of white markers, I was reminded that each one led a life deserving of the honor of the day and left behind families that miss them dearly. We as a nation are forever thankful."



*CDR Cynthia Chennault and LCDR Jennifer Jabara before the Parade of Flags at the Memorial Day Ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery.*



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**OTHER AVAILABLE ATTORNEYS**

- Michael L. Smith, J. D., R.R.T**
- Lance Leider, J.D., LL.M.**
- Carole C. Schriefer, J.D., R.N. (Ret.)**
- Amanda I Forbes, J.D.**
- Castillana Duvernay, J.D.**



# Honoring a Legacy: Meeting RADM Carolyn Beth Mazzella

by CDR Abby Bacon, DrPH, MSN, RN,  
CPHQ

During this year's National Nurses Week, the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps celebrated the unveiling of portraits honoring all 13 Chief Nurse Officers (CNOs) in its history. Seven past and present CNOs gathered for the occasion, each receiving a personalized medallion and sharing their trailblazing legacies. Although RADM Carolyn Beth Mazzella, the sixth Chief Nurse Officer, was unable to attend the ceremony, I had the distinct honor of delivering her medallion to her personally in South Dakota. Meeting with RADM Mazzella, I felt a deep sense of reverence. Here stood a leader whose work helped shape the very foundation of modern public health nursing in our country.

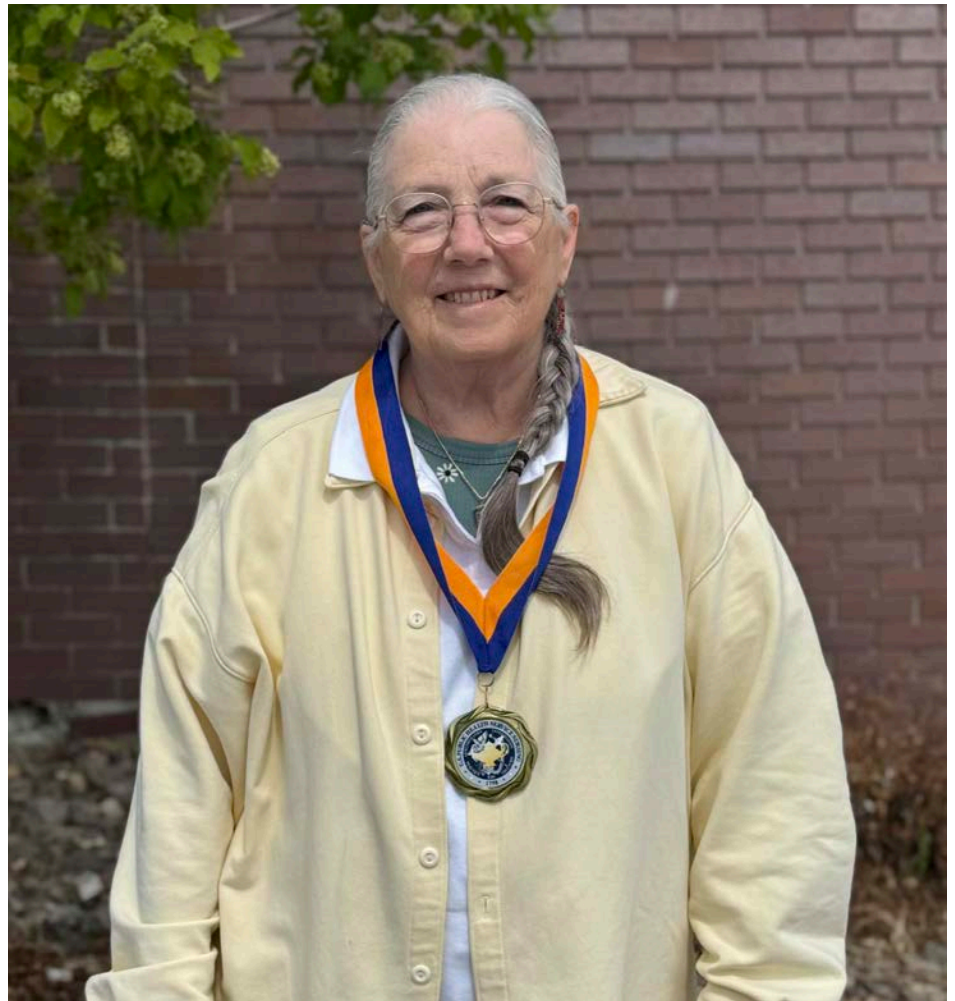
RADM Mazzella's legacy is truly inspiring. A fellow South Dakotan, she began her journey in Wessington Springs and went on to lead national initiatives on HIV/AIDS, immunizations, bioterrorism preparedness, and mental health. She contributed to six landmark Surgeon General's Reports—an extraordinary achievement. She helped shape national health policy, strengthened the public health workforce through the National Health Service Corps, and never lost sight of the communities she served, beginning with the Indian Health Service.

What struck me most during our brief exchange was her warmth and humility. Despite her towering accomplishments, she was gracious and approachable—genuinely curious about today's challenges in public health and supportive of those continuing the work. Meeting RADM Mazzella was more than a highlight—it was a powerful reminder of why we serve. Her legacy is not just one of policy and progress, but of compassion and purpose.

As we reflect on the legacy of all nurses in the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, leaders like RADM Mazzella inspire and remind us of the enduring impact one person can have on a profession and a nation.



*RADM Carolyn Beth Mazzella, sixth Chief Nurse Officer, 1996-2000*



*RADM Mazzella proudly wearing her personalized CNO medallion.*

# Fostering Collaboration Amidst Communication Limitations

by LT Stephanie Rimroth M.Ed. CCC-SLP, BCS-S, CBIST

I recently had the opportunity to instruct a Battlefield Acupuncture Course at Indo-Pacific Command, in Halawa, Hawaii. I trained members of SOCPAC's medical team including two Army Medics, a Physical Therapist, and a Preventative Medicine Physician. While the focus was on instructing the group on a specific technique, the power of cross branch collaboration within our agency, the Department of Defense, was evident and impactful.

I recognized that during times when outside communication is being restricted, we can shift our focus internally to our agencies and organizations fostering growth within. We can demonstrate continued productivity and advance capabilities through education, training, and competencies. We can increase sharing of resources, experiences, and our own expertise to promote internal development. As we navigate these uncharted waters, internal connections become paramount. We must recognize that we have a unique opportunity to focus our efforts on building and developing relationships with individuals outside of our immediate networks but within the bounds of the restrictions.

The experience in teaching at Indo-Pacific Command demonstrated how unique perspectives and diversity adds to the richness of training opportunities. The Army medics provided practical insights into the challenges they face in the field, asking insightful questions about auricular acupuncture in more austere environments. The physical therapist contributed an understanding of the importance of holistic approaches to pain management and experiences with other modalities. The physician discussed her experience in integrative and preventative medicine and the importance of having a diverse array of solutions for patient care.

The opportunity to participate in this level of cooperative teamwork enhanced our experience and provided a path to further collaboration. It reminded us to tap into the knowledge and skills of our existing agencies to develop new capabilities to prepare for challenges in our current fluid environments. Today's training reminded me that innovation does not have to be the product of external learning and sources but can be built through a rich tapestry of experiences cultivated within ourselves.

Leveraging ongoing opportunities to collaborate with other professionals within can assist our officers in elevating capabilities and mutually support our individual and agency growth. By actively developing our knowledge and skills we can improve operational capabilities within our agencies and participate in knowledge-sharing to enhance our effectiveness and resilience. This allows us to each play a part in contributing to a stronger and more cohesive force.



*LT Rimroth providing instruction to Army medics on appropriate placement of Battlefield Acupuncture (BFA) needles.*



*LT Rimroth observing placement of auricular acupuncture needle during BFA training.*

My experience teaching battlefield acupuncture to active duty and civilian staff at SOCPAC the was more than just providing a service or teaching a specific skill. This experience was a powerful reminder of the importance of collaboration and being internally resourceful. As we face ongoing communication challenges, let us remain committed to fostering our collective capabilities and supporting each other in growing to enhance our mission readiness. Within our agencies, we can navigate the current evolving landscape and emerge stronger and more capable as service members of the United States Public Health Service Corps.

# OBITUARIES

## CAPT (Ret) Rita K. Chow

With heavy hearts, we share the news of the passing of Captain Rita K. Chow, EdD, RN, USPHS, a devoted COA member for 57 years. A pioneering nurse, educator, and dedicated public health advocate, Chow passed away peacefully on June 9, 2025, at the age of 98. She was deeply committed to advancing initiatives for USPHS officers, playing a key role in efforts such as the fight to secure tax parity for retired officers in Virginia up until her passing.

Chow began her nursing career as a teaching assistant and staff nurse at Stanford University Hospital from 1950 to 1952, having earned her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Stanford in 1950. She went on to receive her Master of Science in Teaching Surgical Nursing from Case Western Reserve University in 1955 and later earned a Doctor of Education degree from Columbia University in 1968. Further studies in public health and gerontology at George Mason University would focus her lifelong commitment to the care of aging populations.

After transitioning from the U.S. Army Reserves in 1968, she joined the U.S. Public Health Service. Her distinguished 27-year career advanced public health policy and nursing practices across the country including: Associate Editor, American Journal of Nursing; Deputy Director, Health Care Resources Branch; Deputy Chief Nurse Officer, U.S. Public Health Service; Deputy Director, Office of Long-Term Care; and Supervisory Clinical Nurse, Indian Health Service.

Deputy Surgeon General RADM Denise Hinton remembers her legacy, “Captain Rita K. Chow dedicated her life in service to the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps with unwavering integrity, compassion, and vision. As a trailblazer in gerontological nursing and public health, she broke barriers not for recognition, but to ensure others would have a path to follow. Her legacy continues in every nurse she mentored, every policy she helped shape, and every life uplifted by her quiet strength and profound commitment to service.”

Since 1974, Chow focused much of her work on improving care for older adults. In 1996, she became Director of the National Interfaith Coalition on Aging and the National Council on Aging. She authored or edited over 100 professional publications and was honored with more than 35 national awards. In 1999, she was inducted into the Columbia University Teachers College Nursing Hall of Fame. Most recently, in 2024, she was named a Living Legend by the American Academy of Nursing—one of the highest honors in the field.

Nurse Category Chief Professional Officer RDML Jennifer Moon reflects on her contributions to public health and the nursing profession, “It is my honor to be able to recognize the lifelong leadership and compassion that has left an indelible mark on all who had the privilege to serve with her. Through decades of service, Captain Chow inspired generations of nurses and public health professionals, advancing



Captain Rita K. Chow

care, knowledge, and health equity across several underserved populations. Her legacy endures in the lives she improved and the leaders she mentored. She truly exemplified the highest standards of service, and her impact has been exceptional. May her memory continue to guide and inspire us all.”

All of us at COA are honored to have worked alongside Captain Chow and to have witnessed her remarkable dedication firsthand. Her tireless advocacy and generous mentorship made a lasting impact on our community. We are grateful for her decades of service and friendship, and she will be deeply missed. [The funeral will be held on July 18, 2025 and will be livestreamed.](#)



## CAPT (Ret) Richard Anderson

Richard (Dick) Anderson, age 91, of Sun City West, AZ passed away

unexpectedly on April 8, 2025. Dick was born in 1933 to Ralph and Clara Anderson in Harding County, South Dakota. He grew up on the family ranch and graduated from high school in Buffalo, South Dakota. He then went on to obtain a degree in Civil Engineering from South Dakota State University. After graduation

he enlisted into the Commissioned Officer Corp and went into the Public Health Service (PHS). At the start of his career he met and married Ruth Ljungren. They and their family spent the next 21 years traveling throughout the country with the PHS. After retiring from service, he started a second career in real estate and project managing.

They retired to Sun City West where Dick enjoyed trying out new hobbies such as ceramics. He also enjoyed traveling, going on multiple cruises, and driving up north to

visit relatives every summer. He played golf frequently and became very active in his church (Crown of Life Lutheran Church).

Dick is preceded in death by his parents and brothers Ray and Ron.

He is survived by his wife Ruth, his children Jodi Anderson, Joni Anderson, Rick (Carolyn) Anderson and Renae (Rich) Mivshek, five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren, and multiple nieces and nephews. His kindness, strength and love will be missed by all.

# Serving with Purpose: COA Volunteers with Special Olympics Alaska

by LT Erika Thammavongsa, BSN, RN, WCC

As Commissioned Corps officers, we're committed to reaching those who are often underserved, including individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who continue to face barriers to health care and inclusion. In Alaska, staying physically active can be especially challenging due to extreme weather, limited facilities, and geographic isolation. As a result, Alaskans must be intentional about movement and lean on community-driven efforts to stay engaged and well. Special Olympics Alaska (SOAK) embodies this spirit through its mission: to provide year-round sports training and Olympic-style competition for children and adults with intellectual disabilities bringing together the communities from all over Alaska.



*LCDR Theresa Castellanos, LT Erika Thammavongsa, and LT Kobe Thammavongsa serve breakfast to the athletes at the 2025 SOAK Summer Games.*

The Aurora Borealis Branch of the Commissioned Officers Association (COA) based in Anchorage, AK has been proud to support SOAK for over 15 years; an experience that continually reminds us of the power of inclusion, connection, and community. Officers and their family members regularly volunteer during SOAK events, serving opening night dinners and early morning breakfasts that nourish

athletes and create moments that extend far beyond the games.

At the 2025 Winter Games in February, COA volunteers helped serve over 124 athletes, 53 unified partners, and 15 coaches, ensuring every participant was met with warm food, encouragement, and a sense of community. Our contributions, though simple, reflect the heart of service; showing compassion, uplifting others,

and helping every athlete feel seen and supported. In a state where isolation, limited facilities, and extreme weather can provide challenges to keeping our communities active, we come together to find ways to ensure everyone has the opportunity to get active and celebrate not only victories on the field, but the shared values of inclusion, compassion, and community.

## In Lieu of Flowers

The COF wishes to thank those families, who, in time of mourning, have asked that “in Lieu of Flowers a donation be made to the PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation.”

This is a thoughtful and lasting salute to the contributions made by the dedicated members of the Commissioned Corps. COF provides a listing of those donating “in memory of “ to the family. Thank you for thinking of those who will follow.

Donations to the Foundation should be sent to Commissioned Officers Foundation, P.O. Box 189 Cheltenham, MD 20623 or can be made at

<https://www.phscof.org/>

# REMINDER



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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR from page 1

*Government Efficiency (DOGE) actions, thus preventing officers from fully engaging in the mission of their agency and the continuation or completion of projects.*

- *Reassignments to new offices or agencies due to DOGE actions, leading to delay in professional growth and other opportunities.*
- *Reduction in travel to conferences and meetings that may have prevented officers' professional growth and create a barrier to disseminate their work through speaking engagements and podium or poster presentations.*
- *Feelings of uncertainty of where they may be assigned in the next few months.*
- *Limitations at agencies (duty stations) who are facing significant changes in normal daily activities which can be critical to an officer's responsibilities and may impact promotion opportunities.*
- *Limitations by agencies of activities to only those currently mandated by Congress while officers await potential reassignment to a new agency.*
- *Restricted travel, preventing officers from conducting normal parts of their jobs such as conducting site visits or holding community meetings.*

- *Uncertainty of new regulations and policies causing officers to function at a diminished capacity as they seek further guidance on agency shifts.*
- *Restrictions of training and travel causing continuing education and training benchmarks needed for promotion not being met.*
- *Rescission of government funding for research and other projects have made it impossible to meet benchmarks.*

It is felt that this temporary reprieve could be done through Section 3, Part c., page 2 of the POM 821.89 Promotion Opt Out Policy, as follows: "The SG may authorize further requests, in addition to the two that the Director, CCHQ, may approve, to opt out of an ITZ examination for the same grade in unique and exceptional circumstances (e.g., full-time long-term training that exceeds two years)."

By implementing this one-time reprieve for the upcoming promotion cycle, officers who have experienced significant changes in their work situation would experience increased morale and reduced distress and anxiety. Since it would be optional, this exception would not affect those who want to proceed as usual.

What do you think about this proposal? Are similar situations affecting you and your opportunities for promotion this year? If so, I would love to hear from you. Drop me a line at [jrychnovsky@coausphs.org](mailto:jrychnovsky@coausphs.org).

Until next time!

# PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation

## Donations Received May and June 2025

### Leadership Society (\$10,000+)

None

### President's Society (\$5,000 - \$9,999)

None

### Platinum (\$1,000 - \$4,999)

CAPT Stanley Wei

### Gold (\$500 - \$999)

Mr. John DiMaggio  
 Dr. Tine Hansen-Turton  
 CAPT James Minor, in memory of  
 CAPT (Ret) John Parascandola and  
 in recognition of RADM (Ret) Richard  
 Church  
 RADM Kenneth Moritsugu  
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### Silver (\$250 - \$499)

CAPT Mary Ingram  
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### Bronze (\$100 - \$249)

CAPT George Baacke  
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Mrs. Carol Dellapenna  
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## We Welcome New Members of COA – May and June 2025

LT Spundan Dave, *FL*  
 LCDR Michael Hodnett, *MD*

LT Nicole Huggins, *SD*  
 CDR Gayle Lawson, *NJ*  
 LT Luke Logan, *KY*

LT Ivanna Plymouth, *MD*  
 LTJG Abdullah Shaief, *NY*

## COA Donations

Commissioned Officers Association of the USPHS Donations Received  
 May and June 2025

### Friend (Under \$100)

CAPT Lawrence Chaitkin  
 LCDR Robert Grove  
 CAPT Dorothy Sogn

### Bronze (\$100 - \$249)

CAPT Betty Rufus  
 CAPT Theodore Westley

The COA *Frontline* (ISSN 10937161) is published monthly except a combined issue in January/February and June/July by the Commissioned Officers Association of the United States Public Health Service, 8201 Corporate Drive, Suite 615, Landover, MD 20785, (301) 731-9080; Fax: (301) 731-9084; Periodicals Postage Paid at Hyattsville, MD and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to PO Box 189, Cheltenham, MD 20623. A report of timely information concerning activities of the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service. Distributed exclusively to Association Members.



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