

from the  
Executive  
Director



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## Southwest and United Airlines Join Allegiant and Spirit Airlines in Offering Waived Baggage Fees

A few months ago, the law offices of Shannon James, PLLC, generously offered pro bono assistance to the Commissioned Officers Association (COA) in addressing the issue of inequities faced by U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps (USPHSCC) officers while traveling on commercial airlines. For years, officers experienced significant mistreatment when inquiring about waived baggage fees and other benefits given to members of the armed forces.

In a letter sent to each airline, Shannon James explained COA's mission "to protect and enhance the public health and safety of the United States by supporting and advancing the interests of the Commissioned Corps and its officers." She educated them about the Commissioned Corps and the crucial role USPHSCC officers play in safeguarding public health, especially during the recent COVID-19 fight. She requested that each airline extend the benefits currently offered to military service members to include the USPHSCC officers as well. "Commissioned Officers of the U.S. Public Health Service are entitled to all the rights, benefits, privileges, and immunities now or hereafter provided

UNITED 

allegiant  
air 

spirit® 

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for commissioned officers of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, and Space Force," she emphasized, citing 42 U.S.C. S 213 as the basis for this entitlement. "Commissioned Corps members receive a DD214 upon separation and are entitled to the same federal benefits such as VA disability and Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits."

Southwest Airlines was the first to respond with a positive stance. Olga

Bograd, Labor & Employment Attorney at Southwest Airlines, expressed their commitment to supporting those who bravely serve our country. "Southwest provides benefits to uniformed service members, including those from the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service. Uniformed service members with valid military I.D. can board between the A and B groups if they do not receive an 'A' group

# 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

Discounted degree and certificate programs like PhD, DrPH, MPH, MSPH, and MHA

## NYMC Online MPH

50 percent discount for the online MPH and certificate programs

## Scholarship Programs

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

## CPH Exam Discount

Deep member discount and free study guide for Certified in Public Health (CPH) Exam



## Legislative Update

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

The current agenda will continue to guide COA's advocacy efforts for the second half of the 118th Congress. I invite you to review it [here](#).

Our legislative consultant, Taylor Strategies, and our Deputy Director, David Corrigan, have been working hard lately on two issues, saving the USPHS Ready Reserve and parental leave parity.

As you all know, when the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, referred to as the Affordable Care Act or Obamacare, was enacted in March 2010, it eliminated the Inactive Reserve Corps (IRC). IRC Commissioned Officers, many of whom were former active-duty officers, served short or intermittent tours of active duty with agencies, operative divisions, or programs of the Department of Health and Human Services, as well as in medically underserved areas of the nation.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, also known as the CARES Act, created the new Ready Reserve Corps (RRC) of the USPHS. Unfortunately, due to haste or oversight, the CARES Act did not address several issues related to parity with other components of the Reserve Force, including eligibility for GI Bill benefits and certain leave provisions in Title 5.

To make matters worse, the funding rescissions required by the deal to temporarily raise the debt ceiling, known as the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023, eliminated funding for both the Ready Reserve and the Public Health Emergency Response Strike Team (PHERST) teams, jeopardizing the futures of those organizations and about 200 jobs. COA leapt into action, partnering with the Reserve Organization of America (ROA), in a joint effort through The Military Coalition, to receive support from other



COA's Deputy Director, Dave Corrigan, presents the 2023 COA Public Health Congressional Leadership Award to Senator Tammy Duckworth's legislative team. Stephanie DeLuca (left) is Senator Duckworth's Policy Advisor. CDR Toya Kelley, USPHS (right) is detailed to Senator Duckworth's office to support the Senator's Congressional Fellowship Program.

Military and Veterans Service Organizations. COA has also been communicating with Commissioned Corps Headquarters, federal legislators, and consultants about ways to support the Ready Reserve and PHERST. Those efforts included a letter addressed to the leaders of the House and Senate Appropriations Leadership, signed by all but one of the living former Surgeons General and Acting Surgeons General, extolling Congress to restore \$48 million in funding to support the operations of the Ready Reserve and PHERST. In addition, COA sent a similar letter to Members and Senators of both parties, signed by 12 other member organizations of The Military Coalition, requesting the same appropriations. Finally, on July 19, Jacque, Dave, Taylor Strategies and a small group of Illinois-based officers met with Senator Tammy Duckworth's staff to discuss

# Asian Pacific American Officers Committee Celebrates Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Month

by LCDR Miaka Huynh and LT Helen Young

The month of May was Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) Heritage Month. During this month, we celebrate and give tributes to generations of those who have enriched American history and acknowledge those who continue to make strides for the future. Throughout this month, AANHPI cultures are honored and shared with the masses while simultaneously addressing challenges still faced by the community and developing paths forward.

Asian Pacific American Officers Committee (APAOC), a chartered minority advisory group within the Office of the Surgeon General, celebrated AANHPI Heritage month this year with partnering organizations and communities to share these histories and celebrate the diverse culture that exists today. In commemoration of AANHPI Heritage Month, APAOC participated and hosted several events successfully.

A summary of the highlights of the APAOC event is as follows:

- APAOC Public Relations Subcommittee led by Chair LCDR Kathleen Tisdale and Co-Chair LCDR William Chang hosted the 3rd Annual AANHPI Heritage Month celebration in a virtual event with a theme of “Celebrating AANHPI Women Leaders.” The event featured inspiring female AANHPI leaders who defied stereotypes and reached their full potential in pursuit of their dreams. The United States Public Health Service (USPHS) distinguished guest speaker, and APAOC Senior Advisor, CAPT Juliette Taylor, shared her wisdom through a heartfelt keynote speech with 65 participants from various associations and organizations.
- APAOC co-sponsored the VADM Vivek H. Murthy Distinguished Lecture Series for Public Health Leadership with over 500 participants. This event was the third in a series of fireside chats with VADM Murthy with the goal of recognizing public health leaders in AANHPI whose perseverance profoundly affected and advanced public health. At this event, VADM Murthy recognized Dr. Dave Choksy, Professor at New York University, and previous health commissioner of New York City, for his exemplary leadership.
- Supported the NIH 2nd Annual AANHPI Health Research Conference over a span of two days with LT Jin Qin presenting on “Cancer Health Disparities in Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders” and LCDR Doan Singh representing APAOC by highlighting USPHS and APAOC’s efforts on advancing health equity through a conference presentation and co-authoring a NIH Record Publication in its June 9th issue,.
- Provided outreach and education on the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline to promote youth mental well-being and destigmatize beliefs around mental health at Youth Services of Tulsa during the USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The team of 12 officers provided education on the 988 Lifeline and assisted with the needs of the facility, including sorting and reorganizing the clothing closet and creating over 600 snack bags.



*USPHS Officers promoting the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at Youth Services of Tulsa during the 56th Annual Scientific and Training Symposium.*

- APAOC members collaborated with the DC Metro Surgeon General Educational Team within the Prevention through Active Community Engagement (PACE) program to educate approximately 500 community members about healthy eating, hand hygiene, mental health, and naloxone administration. The event took place at the James Lee Community Center in Falls Church, Virginia, as part of an Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Festival. Ten officers connected with community members, recruited and promoted the USPHS, and enjoyed lion dances, culture show, dances, and delicious Asian cuisines.
- Sixteen APAOC members led another event at Seneca Valley High School in Germantown, Maryland at a health fair and served over 700 community members. The team disseminated valuable information to the community regarding several health-related subjects, including mental health, tobacco cessation, healthy eating habits, and the life-saving potential of naloxone in opioid overdose situations. Maryland County provided naloxone kits, which were distributed to 50 community members. Our diverse team members facilitated the dissemination of educational materials in multiple languages, including Chinese, Korean, Japanese, both in written and spoken forms. Blood pressure screenings were also provided for the community.
- Three outreach events in collaboration with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) in New York. The two volunteer officers provided an outreach event presentation during May’s AANHPI Heritage Month Celebration to over 110 community members. Discussions covered various topics including an overview of the Inflation Reduction Act, what happens when the COVID-19 public health emergency ends, and how USPHS APAOC members positively impact public health.

With the expectation of increased dynamic interest and local area commitment, APAOC’s efforts continue to expand. APAOC is a diverse and growing force that continues to thrive in the communities it serves while raising the visibility of USPHS and promoting the Surgeon General’s priorities. Participation in future events and support for these events are strongly encouraged.



# A Handout That Is a Hand Up!

by CAPT Julie A. Niven, LCSW, DCSW, MAC

Rates of homelessness in Tacoma, Washington, like many places, is increasing. Encampments can be found throughout the city sometimes stretching for blocks. It's distressing to see these makeshift shelters constructed of tents, tarps, pallets, and parted-out vehicles. It is equally distressing to feel helpless to aid in a meaningful way.

I struggle with unanswered "whys" regarding homelessness. I've read the recent increase is due in part to a lack of affordable housing. Some estimates place our country at about seven million units short of enough affordable housing for all the low-income households in need. To compound matters, the state systems tasked to help manage homelessness vary widely. Depending on resource availability, a percentage of homeless individuals can't even find a shelter bed. This is one factor that leads to the growth of encampments.

Being homeless is detrimental to an individual's physical and mental health. Witnesses to homelessness are also negatively impacted. I've struggled for years with what might be best to give those at intersections asking for a hand. In the past, I've given money, a piece of fruit, a can of soup, knit hats, and gloves. Most recently I started carrying socks to offer. I got this idea from a clothing bank I volunteered with in Virginia. The staff there told me socks and underwear are both high demand items. But a clean pair of socks only goes so far.

I thought, there must be more I can do to help! After researching social service resources in my city and county, I called the primary one: 2-1-1. I was connected to a Referral Source Information Specialist. I told the clerk why I was calling and asked how 2-1-1 can help those who are homeless. The specialist told me about the resources they have for housing, rent and utility assistance, shelter info, services for victims of domestic violence and those with

see **HANDOUT** continued on page 11

## COA Advocates for State Benefits at NASDVA Conference

by Dave Corrigan, Deputy Director of COA

To continue COA's mission of advocating for benefits parity for USPHS officers, COA has been attending the annual conference of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA). This year, I am attending the conference in Buffalo, New York, from August 14 to August 16. Given the timely nature of the conference with the publication of August's issue of *Frontline*, COA wants to provide an update for our members on what we plan on accomplishing this week. I am writing this article at the conclusion of the first day of the conference and plan to update our members in the September issue with the additional progress we make during the conference and in the weeks following.

New York Governor, Kathy Hochul, opened the conference by discussing the need for unifying behind the non-partisan issue of support the nation's veterans. She shared her experiences, rooted in being the family member of multiple Vietnam Veterans, of seeing the negative attitude towards veterans in the past and how there is always room to improve how we serve veterans. Although New York is friendly to USPHS officers and veterans, her intent of representing ALL veterans resonates and should be the goal of all state governors.

This week's conference schedule is packed with veterans experts and advocates presenting best practices for how to best serve veterans. However, I have been using the whitespace and meal breaks to discuss state-level advocacy with those in charge. In the short time that I have been here, I have already met with the directors of Pennsylvania, Alabama, Michigan, and Florida. Fortunately, I am not the only advocate for USPHS in attendance.



*New York State Governor, Kathy Hochul, shakes hands with NASDVA President and Executive Director of Florida Department of Veterans Affairs, James Hartsell. Commissioner of New York Division of Veterans Affairs is also pictured.*

This year, Commissioned Corps Headquarters (CCHQ) office of legislative affairs attended the conference. Rear Admiral Susan Orsega, Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary for Health (ASH) and the US Surgeon General. (SG), briefed the audience to educate attendees about what the USPHS is, where USPHS officers serve, and what hurdles USPHS officers face when applying for benefits at the state-level. Although CCHQ uniformed representatives attended the conference strictly to educate the audience and not engage in lobbying efforts, COA's role is less restrictive. COA's intent, and what I will continue to do, is to advocate for officers whether through administrative or legislative processes.

I hope to have some additional good news in the coming weeks as COA continues to build its relationship with state departments of veterans affairs. Look for an update in the September issue of *Frontline*. Reach out to [advocacy@coausphs.org](mailto:advocacy@coausphs.org) with any questions.

# DC COA Awarded \$5,000 in Scholarships to 10 Officers to Attend the USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium in Tulsa, OK

by CDR Quynh-Van Tran, PharmD, BCPP, RAC, CDR Bic Nguyen, PharmD, MPH, BCPS, LCDR Morgan Lee, Meng, EIT, and LCDR Scott Steffen, PhD, CQIA, CQI, CQT, CQPA

The DC COA USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium Scholarship Program was established in 2023 to promote junior officers' attendance and provide mentoring and career development opportunities at the USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium. This scholarship program offered partial financial support (\$500) to DC COA officers to attend the 2023 USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium in Tulsa, Oklahoma on May 8-11, 2023. Priority was given to junior officers (O-4 or lower), first-time USPHS symposium attendees, those who receive partial or no agency funding, officers that have contributed or actively engaged in DC COA activities, and officers with defined roles or activities at the 2023 USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium.

This year, DC COA awarded 10 \$500 scholarships to officers in five categories (health services, pharmacy, nursing, dietitian, and veterinary) and from nine different agencies: National Institutes of Health (NIH), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR), Commissioned Corps Headquarters (CCHQ), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Bureau of Prison (BOP), Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The recipients of the 2023 DC COA USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium Scholarship Program were LCDR Angelina Williams, LCDR Jennie Eng, LCDR Briana Rider, LCDR Jamillah Bynum, LCDR Diane



From Left to Right: CAPT Juliette Taylor, CAPT Luis Rodriguez, LCDR LaKeisha Stewart, LCDR Rosson Smith, LCDR Jen Eng, LCDR Angelina Williams, LCDR Briana Rider, LCDR Jamillah Bynum, LCDR Traci Murray, LCDR Diane Richardson, LT Johanna Paillet-Growl, LT Jorge Franco

Richardson, LT Johanna Paillet-Growl, LT Jorge Franco, LCDR Tara Lemons, LCDR LaKeshia Stewart, and LCDR Rosson Smith.

Many of the officers noted that receiving the scholarship significantly impacted their decision to attend the symposium. One officer stated, "I would not have attended if I did not receive the scholarship." "The scholarship helped to offset expenses for registration and hotel stay in order to attend the symposium since I did not receive funding from my agency," said another officer, "and it allowed me to not stress about the cost of the trip."

The scholarship recipients were able to network with other officers. They volunteered with category day planning and JOAG Uniform Inspection Booth, presented posters, performed for the Surgeon General's Music Ensemble, facilitated a workshop on health equity, participated in mentoring sessions, and received continuing education credits. The officers also had an opportunity to attend a "Meet and Greet" with the DC COA Leadership Team (DC COA President CAPT Juliette Taylor, Secretary LCDR

Scott Steffen, and board member CDR Javier Muniz).

Below are more comments and feedback from officers regarding the benefits of attending the USPHS Symposium:

- "I wanted to explore opportunities to grow the Nurse Category by mentoring newly commissioned and junior officers. We made connections that will continue post-symposium to grow our category and the USPHS."
- "My reason to attend was to both perform as a volunteer for the Surgeon General's Music Ensemble for the first time, and to connect with other officers about possibilities of a future career move. I received great advice from fellow officers. It was great to meet officers whose only way of previously connecting with me was through email."
- "Overall, it was a great experience, though very busy. I performed with the USPHS Choral/Music Ensemble, was awarded the 2022 Dietitian Responder of the Year, and was able to experience the "Black Wall Street Tour."

see **SCHOLARSHIP** continued on page 7

## Facing Uncertainty

by CDR James Gooch, Chair, COA Board of Directors

Change is the only constant in today's world of uncertainty. Despite our desire for structure and stability, nature is in a constant state of change. Human nature is similar. Surprisingly, Congress is no different. The recent budget uncertainty facing the Ready Reserve and Public Health Emergency Response Strike Teams (PHERST) is a stark reminder. On June 3, 2023 Congress passed the Fiscal Responsibility Act, thereby rescinding funding from the American Rescue Plan in support of both programs. Efforts are underway to advocate for the restoration and allocation of funding, but there is no guarantee.

While this type of funding gap occurs often across the federal government and even in other uniform services, the uncertainty right now is quite painful. We are a small service with very large hopes and dreams. The programs in jeopardy— many of which predate the Affordable Care Act (ACA) when initial plans for ready reserve were being hatched. And whether you agree with the structure and implementation, it matters not. On the heels of the pandemic, as well as the numerous other public health emergencies and missions over the last few years, this just plainly feels wrong. It's disrespectful to the many years of service and sacrifice. It's disrespectful to the officers who recently joined the USPHS Ready Reserve and PHERST. It's an unfortunate reminder of how far we have come and how quickly it can all disappear. It was just six years ago when we were under scrutiny for being a hallmark of government waste. Thankfully, upon a detailed review, we were not found wanting. In fact, our return on investment was large once the invisible externalities of value were accounted for in the audit. So large that investments were made for our future in the form of USPHS Ready Reserve and PHERST.

How and where we go from here will be telling. Our 225 years of history is fraught with the turbulent waters of uncertain government funding. Ask any officer with more than 10 years of service, they remember. Every few years, a new storm rages on the horizon. We batten down the hatches and steady the course to ride it out every time. Sometimes it passes silently. Sometimes it grips us deeply and we are directed off course. And as always, we find our way. I trust a new course will be set as we avert this storm on the horizon as well. After all, we are a resilient crew and smooth seas never make skilled sailors.

However, my thoughts in recent weeks have turned to not just the officers potentially impacted, but their families, as well. I can't help but think of how this uncertainty right now is impacting their lives.



*CDR James Gooch assumed responsibility as Chair of the COA Board of Directors in July 2023*

It's the start of a school season for so many. The hopes, dreams, and plans that are wrapped in the hearts of every service family – so quickly cast into doubt. How do we explain this uncertainty to our loved ones – to our children? It's not easy. It's an unfortunate task that befalls the families of most service members at one time or another. Uncertainty, in its many forms, can build insecurity and propagate fear. It can erode trust in the organization and demoralize the crew. We should not allow that for our service families. We must hold fast and be intentional with transparency, communication, and compassion for the families impacted. We must focus on the things we can control.

I'm hopeful for a positive outcome. I'm reassured that efforts are underway to find a silver lining (see Parity for Public Health Service Ready Reserve Act S.2297). I'm grateful for the crew that continues to fight the storm and steady the ship, thank you for all you do! And for those just joining us, now is the time. If you are not a member of COA, sign up. If you are not aware of these issues, read up. If you are in place and able to hire, step up. These officers and families need your support. We must find grounding in these uncertain times - with each other and as a service. Uncertainty can be transcendent. It can lead us beyond the storm in new directions. How we handle this uncertainty will speak volumes for our service over the next generation one way or the other. And as history has shown us, this will not be the last time either. Change is the only constant.



# Alaska Welcomes the Surgeon General

by LCDR Stephanie Ogle and CAPT Ann Marie Bott

Surgeon General VADM Vivek Murthy visited the Alaska Native Medical Center campus in Anchorage, Alaska on Monday, June 26th, 2023, to discuss his May 2023 Advisory on Social Media and Youth Mental Health. The advisory highlights what policymakers, technology companies, parents and caregivers, children and adolescents, and researchers can do to provide tools for families to make informed decisions and create a safe social media environment for adolescents and children. VADM Murthy's Alaska tour was a 24-hour visit including round table discussions with providers and state leaders discussing steps that can be taken to strengthen safety standards, protect children's privacy, support digital and media literacy, and fund research.

During the visit, Alaska's U.S. Senator Dan Sullivan learned more about the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) including about the 190 USPHS commissioned officers that are stationed in the Alaska area assigned to the Indian Health Service, the United States Coast Guard, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the United States Department of Veteran's Affairs. VADM Murthy invited the senator to a meet-and-greet to hear from officers on the specialized work being completed in Alaska. As a Marine, Senator Sullivan embraced the opportunity to attend, listened to officers, and humbly requested that we as constituents make a request to his office for anything needed.

She was one of the officers selected by the Surgeon General who shared a short biography of her work. CDR Jazz Fajardo is the Detox Nurse Manager for Southcentral Foundation Detox Program. CDR Fajardo provides nursing leadership, education, and staff support maintaining clinical oversight of 29 Detox Floor Nurses to deliver safe, high quality customer care in the South Central Foundation (SCF) Detox Program. The SCF Detox Program offers services to customers to ensure quality and safe medical withdrawal management/detoxification (MAT) for customers seeking substance abuse treatment. The SCF Detox Program is a licensed 22- bed facility providing 24/7 medical services.



*CDR Jazz Fajardo discussing her role as Detox Nurse Manager for the Southcentral Foundation Detox Program. Photo courtesy of Southcentral Foundation.*



*Alaska Area Officers gathered at the Southcentral Foundation Nuka Learning Institute building for the Surgeon General's Meet and Greet Event. Photo courtesy of Southcentral Foundation.*

VADM Murthy expressed his enthusiasm for having the opportunity to return to Alaska after his first visit as Surgeon General in 2016. For the second half of the event, he addressed officers' questions ranging from workplace wellness programs to advocating for fellow officer mental health. He encouraged officers to take note of the time each of them spends on social media and whether it was limiting time with family, sleep, or affecting performance. In closing, VADM Murthy encouraged officers to build a sense of community with one another.

On behalf of the Aurora Borealis Commissioned Officers Association, we thank the Surgeon General for his visit.

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## **SCHOLARSHIP** from page 5

- "Network - opportunities were everywhere, including with the Chief Professional Officers (CPOs)"
- "... an amazing morale-boosting with new officers and old friends."

All officers recommended the DC COA Scholarship program to other officers. One officer noted that "the application process was streamlined which made it super easy."

We would like to expand the DC COA USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium Scholarship Program and raise more funding to support more officers to attend the 2024 USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium in Jacksonville, Florida. If you are interested in contributing and supporting our officers to attend USPHS Symposium next year, please contact CDR Quynh-Van Tran at quynhtran4608@gmail.com and CDR Bic Nguyen at bicnguyen1234@gmail.com.



## The Work of COF: PHS Commissioned Corps Service Mascot Bringing HOPE to a Special Place (The Children’s Inn at NIH)

by CAPT Gene Migliaccio,  
DrPH, USPHS (Ret), COF  
President

On 21 July 2023, I had an honor to represent PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation for the Advancement of Public Health (COF) at an event showcasing the first-ever official United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps service mascot - LCDR Abigail, a trained facility dog who will provide therapeutic care to patients and USPHS officers. LCDR Abigail, a Labrador Retriever, is a Warrior Canine Connection dog, who received special training to serve as a facility dog.



*LCDR Abigail, the new mascot of the USPHS, gifted by COF.*

LCDR Abigail was named after the former First Lady of the United States, Abigail Adams, who has a historical connection to the service. The origin and history of the USPHS Commissioned Corps trace back to July 16, 1798, when Congress passed an Act, signed by President John Adams, creating the U.S. Marine Hospital Service to protect against the spread of disease from sailors returning from overseas ports and thus began the story of the USPHS. This was a special day because the COF worked diligently with the Office of the Surgeon General (OSG) and other offices within HHS to make this possible.

The USPHS Commissioned Corps mascot program is made possible by a memorandum of understanding between the USPHS Commissioned Corps and COF. The mascot will be used for ceremonial purposes and accompany our officers as they work to protect the nation’s health.

LCDR Abigail’s first official visit was to a very special place - The Children’s Inn at NIH is a residential “place like home” for families



*CAPT (Ret) Terry Hoffeld, COF Trustee, CAPT (Ret) Gene Migliaccio, COF President, RADM Denise Hinton, Deputy Surgeon General, LCDR Abigail, USPHS mascot, and LCDR Dan Johnson, LCDR Abigail’s handler visit the NIH Children’s Inn.*

with children, teens, and young adults participating in leading-edge research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland. NIH Clinical Center is the nation’s premier biomedical research hospital, providing an opportunity for families to be partners in advancing medical discoveries and improving the health of people all over the world. While NIH takes care of the child’s medical needs, The Inn tends to the child’s heart, soul, and spirit.

COF joined forces at the event with Deputy U.S. Surgeon General, Rear Admiral Denise Hinton and Director of Commissioned Corps Headquarters, Rear Admiral Richard Schobitz. Also, participating was CAPT (Ret.) Terry Hoffeld, DDS who is a member of the COA Board of Directors (Retired Officer Representative) as well as a member of the COF Board of Trustees.

What a wonderful experience to bring HOPE with our Service mascot – LCDR Abigail – to children and their families at The Children’s Inn at NIH.

Source: HHS Press Release, HHS Announces the First-Ever Official United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps Service Mascot, 21 July 2023



# Education Is a Powerful Weapon in The Battle for Veterans' Health and Wellness

by LT Cashmere Miller, DNP, APRN, FNP-C

For decades, countless military personnel have experienced varying degrees of health problems that resulted from toxic environmental exposures during their military service. Many of our U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) officers can also identify with these experiences—especially those with prior service in the armed forces. On 10 August 2022, Congress passed the Sergeant First Class Health Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxins ACT of 2022 (PACT) Act. This historic law is the result of a years-long fight for access to health care and benefits for veterans exposed to toxins. The PACT Act extends eligibility for Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare and benefits to veterans with qualifying service if they have manifested any of the specified diseases after their military service. This law applies to veterans who served in various wars and duty stations nationally and internationally with toxic exposures. These include:

- Vietnam Era Veterans
- Gulf War Era Veterans
- Radiation-Exposed Veterans
- Camp Lejeune Contaminated Water

The types of Military Environmental Exposures include;

- Airborne Hazards: burn pits, oil well fires, sandstorms, dust, particulate matter
- Chemical/Biological warfare agents: nerve agents, mustard gas, Agent Orange
- Occupational Hazards
- Radiation: depleted uranium, nuclear weapons testing, invisible force fields

Since the PACT Act went into effect, there have been many pending questions about the law and what it means. Veterans are eager to understand how the law applies to them, and providers not well-versed in military experiences need a frame of reference to improve healthcare delivery to veterans. As a nurse practitioner assigned to the Atlanta VA, I have enjoyed educating veterans and providers alike on this important topic through multiple modalities.

The VA has been teaming up with members of Congress, local elected officials, veterans service organizations, state directors of Veterans Affairs, and more to spread awareness to veterans and survivors about new healthcare and benefits. These events cover various areas of concern, including how to apply for benefits, presentations on VA disability, survivor benefits, access to Vet Centers, and measures to prevent fraud. I have been involved in several initiatives at various events held throughout Georgia to provide onsite toxic exposure screenings and educate veterans about health problems associated with toxic military exposures. The screenings are a critical part of implementing the PACT Act and are an essential



*(Left to Right) Gwinnett County, GA Commissioner, Jasper Watkins, LT Cashmere Miller, Congresswoman Lucy McBath, VA physician Dr. Ambardekar, VA PACT Act Navigator, Mrs. Ruchin at the Congressional PACT Act Outreach Event*

step toward ensuring that all toxic-exposed veterans get the care and benefits they deserve. One of my most memorable experiences was working alongside Congresswoman Lucy McBath and Gwinnett County Commissioner Jasper Watkins at a recent Congressional PACT Act Briefing in Gwinnett County, Georgia. I am looking forward to continued success as we aspire to reach as many Atlanta-area veterans and family members as possible.

This past June, I presented during the 2023 American Association for Nurse Practitioners (AANP) National Conference at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans. There were over 4,000 nursing professionals in attendance. The AANP conference provides evidence-based presentations, legislative and policy updates, hands-on workshops, and unparalleled networking opportunities. This opportunity gave me the platform to educate nurse practitioners across the nation about toxic military exposures and provide guidance for exposure-informed care. Many providers in attendance work in primary care and specialized areas and care for many veteran patients. The presentation elicited a considerable amount of positive feedback and further discussion from the audience. I was thrilled to interact with many clinicians dedicated to improving healthcare quality and outcomes for veterans. Healthcare professionals are encouraged to seek additional educational opportunities to advance the standards of practice for veterans.

The well-being and support of our veterans are necessary and of significant importance. Military personnel have experienced so many things during service that were challenging, demanding, and dangerous. Many return to civilian life with physical injuries, and millions suffer from invisible wounds from emotionally traumatic experiences. We must become fully equipped with the knowledge to fight for our veterans' optimal health and wellness. Recognizing mental health as essential to physical health is also critical. Veterans improve their lives every day by connecting with helpful resources and effective treatments for suicidal thoughts and behavior.

Anyone can access the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1 or use the Veterans Crisis Line online chat. This service is free and confidential; you do not have to be enrolled in VA health care.

COMMISSIONED OFFICERS  
ASSOCIATION MEMBER-ONLY EVENT

# RETIRED OFFICER VIRTUAL GATHERING



## PRESENTERS

### Featuring:

- RDML (Ret) Pamela Schweitzer  
COF Board Trustee
- CAPT (Ret) Alan Echt  
Legislative Affairs Committee
- CAPT (Ret) Jacqueline Rychnovsky  
COA Executive Director

### Your Hosts:

- RDML (Ret) Paul Seligman
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## DATE

**TUESDAY  
SEPTEMBER 19, 2023**

## TIME

**1:00 PM (ET)**

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COMMISSIONED OFFICERS ASSOCIATION  
OF THE U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

# Remote Area Medical (RAM) in Baltimore with U.S Public Health Service Officers Support

by LCDR Mirabelle Adamu, LCDR Israel Cross, LCDR Neil Bonzagni, LCDR Folaremi Adeyemo, and LT Nikia Jones-Shaw

On June 10-11, 2023, the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps officers around the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) area partnered with Remote Area Medical (RAM), Baltimore, Maryland to provide medical, dental and vision care to underserved individuals in inner-city Baltimore at the Stadium School in Northeast Baltimore. RAM is a nonprofit provider of free pop-up clinics. Their mission is to prevent pain and alleviate suffering by providing free, quality healthcare to those in need. This event is a life saver for many individuals who do not have health insurance or cannot afford the high deductible or copays from their current insurance plan.

LCDRs Israel Cross and Neil Bonzagni (Deputy Team Lead and Deputy Training Officers, respectively) on the Baltimore Surgeon General's Education Team (SGET)) led the effort to plan and coordinate this event. Seventeen officers from diverse backgrounds and agencies participated with one mission in mind: to promote, improve, and advance the quality of health in the community through education and outreach activities. While



United States Public Health Service officers in the DMV area volunteering at the Remote Area Medical (RAM) event in Baltimore, Maryland

some officers were directly engaged with patients in providing critical dental and pharmacy support, two groups of officers set up tables inside and outside of the front entrance, where they provided naloxone education and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) hands-on training. Lastly, much needed tips on healthy eating were provided. The term "other duties assigned" is no surprise to our officers who exhibited flexibility and

teamwork to accomplish the RAM mission.

The Clinic registered 285 patients and community members and provided over \$80,000 in services. The mission also strengthened community ties and supported the USPHS Commissioned Corps mission, and continued momentum from the USPHS-RAM relationship following the 56th annual symposium in Tulsa, OK.

## HANDOUT from page 4

mental illness, as well as information on how to secure clothing. I told the specialist I was thinking of putting together a resource page I can hand out to individuals on the street. She invited me to come to the 2-1-1 central office, which turns out to be The United Way, to pick up the various marketing materials already in print. Collating and stapling the flyers made it simpler to hand them out together as a packet.

But just me handing out information didn't feel like enough, so I introduced my idea to my duty station administrator (HSA) and gained approval of the project as an adjunct to the Kindness Challenge I started at my workplace. I told my HSA I wanted to

consolidate and print the information on the various United Way flyers, on my own time, and then place them in the breakroom where my colleagues can take them if so desired to hand out when they encounter an individual in need. Further expanding this beyond my county, I thought an article for COA Frontline about this critical public health emergency could encourage others to do the same across our nation. It turns out that 2-1-1 is available in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Despite my sometimes never fully knowing the "whys" of a problem, I can still attend in small ways to the "hows" of solving the problem. I encourage everyone to never doubt the impact we can make as individuals in our world and to never stop trying to do so!



# CALL FOR APPLICATIONS: BARCLAY-GIEL SEED GRANTS

## ELIGIBILITY

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

- Social Connection
- Youth Mental Health
- Workplace Well-Being
- Health Misinformation
- Healthworker Burnout

## DEADLINE

The application period will be **SEPTEMBER 18 – NOVEMBER 12, 2023**. Award recipients will be announced in **February 2024**. Maximum grant amount is \$10,000.

## FUNDED BY

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

## APPLY

Find more information at [PHSCOF.ORG/SEED-GRANTS.HTM](https://PHSCOF.ORG/SEED-GRANTS.HTM)



# JOAG Fellowship

by LCDR Nora Lim, LCDR George Yeh, LCDR Miaka Huynh, LT Christine Nappa, and LT Jamla Rizek

“Protect, promote, and advance the health and safety of the nation.” This mission was instilled in us from the first day we joined the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps. As USPHS officers, we need to seek opportunities that grow us professionally and personally to better serve the nation.

LT Jamla Rizek recently completed a year-long disaster medicine fellowship at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center (BIDMC) Harvard Medical School and Teaching Hospital. As the only nurse and only USPHS officer in a class of 15 fellows, LT Rizek was able to bring a different perspective to share with her peers. Her classmates came from eight countries, but they all worked together to become better health care responders. A main project for the fellowship program was to plan a full-scale disaster exercise in Boston, Massachusetts.

LCDR Miaka Huynh experienced firsthand the results of the extensive planning and collaboration as she participated in the execution of the disaster exercise. Seeing “victims” moulage and yell as first responders arrived on scene to a makeshift bomb exploding was overwhelming. With the noise from the alarms and the hundreds of responders, participants, and evaluators, anyone not aware this was an exercise would think this was a real event.

In true esprit de corps, several USPHS officers attended LT Rizek’s graduation at the Harvard Club in Boston. It was a wonderful



LT Rizek (center) coins her peers.

opportunity to support the incredible achievement of a fellow officer and to experience the beauty and charm that Boston has to offer. The officers presented LT Rizek with a culturally significant gift. In Asian culture, money is given at celebrations—the necklace was meaningful because it was made with flowers constructed out of dollar bills and attached to a kukui nut lei from their first deployment together as a team to American Samoa in March 2022.

For more information about the disaster medicine fellowship Disaster Medicine Fellowship | BIDMC | Harvard Medical Faculty Physicians ([disasterfellowship.org](https://disasterfellowship.org)) or email LT Rizek at [Jamla.rizek@hhs.gov](mailto:Jamla.rizek@hhs.gov).

## Atlanta Branch COA Officers Meet with Chris Schueler, Producer of the USPHS Documentary

by LT Cashmere Miller, DNP, APRN, FNP-C and CDR Rachael Cook, PharmD, MPH, CPH, CHES, NHDP-BC

The Atlanta local branch of the Commissioned Officers Association (ACOA) kicked off 2023 with many exciting events. One of the most exciting was a lunch-and-learn that was held in April for both in-person and virtual attendees to hear from Christopher Schueler, the producer of the USPHS Documentary *Invisible Corps: In Officio Salutis*. During the lunch-and-learn, officers also heard from the national COA Executive Director, CAPT (ret.) Jacqueline Rychnovsky, who provided informative updates about what national COA is doing to improve benefits and experiences for USPHS officers.

CDR Rachael Cook, ACOA’s Branch President, collaborated with LT Cashmere Miller, ACOA’s Professional Development Chair, to plan and organize the lunch-and-learn, which was attended by over 70 officers. The recording of the lunch-and-learn is available here: [Lunch and Learn Recording](#) (Passcode to access recording: 7f?e@.8i).

Officers were eager to attend the lunch-and-learn as it was one of the first in-person activities that ACOA hosted since the COVID-19 pandemic started. In-person attendees gathered at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Roybal Campus to meet with Schueler, who attended virtually. Schueler provided insights about film production and what it was like to meet with some of USPHS’s most respected leaders. ACOA officers were delighted to engage with Schueler as he described the process of how he brought the film to life. The ACOA branch was proud to donate \$1000 to support the Commissioned Officer Foundation (COF) fund for the documentary.

The eagerly anticipated *Invisible Corps* documentary is finally available. The documentary was first aired at the 2023 USPHS Scientific & Training Symposium in Tulsa, Oklahoma in May. ACOA plans to host a private showing of the documentary for Atlanta-area officers, their families, and community members later this summer. To view the documentary, please visit [invisiblecorps.com](https://invisiblecorps.com).



# USPHS Officer Led Efforts with Vista Forge Atlanta: Animal Decontamination and Working Dog Exercise

by Wanda Wilson Egbe, DVM

Beginning in December 2020, the U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) exercise planners coordinated with Vista Forge Ready Reserve, the Atlanta-Fulton County Emergency Management Agency, and interagency partners to create and execute the first series of exercises to train responders to manage human and animal consequences after a 10 kiloton (low-yield) detonation of an improvised nuclear device (IND). Radiation emergencies can pose a significant risk to life, both long and short term. The main goals of the exercises were to test the capabilities and interoperability of the Department of Defense (DoD), federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial governments, form a joint information center to provide consistent public information, develop plans to reunify families (and their pets) at family reception centers, and integrate human and animal decontamination services into field operations. Effective exercises help to ensure that appropriate guidelines are correctly applied and that emergency response workers, civilians, and their pets are not exposed to unnecessary radiation during response operations.

CDR Wanda Wilson Egbe was selected as the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR), National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) veterinary lead on the National Planning Committee for the Vista Forge Exercises. In this role, she provided subject matter expertise (SME) on animal related topics and engaged in more than 180 hours of planning, meetings, workshops, and exercise development that advanced this initiative. "All emergency management plans and protocols should address animal consequence management including those related to radiologic incidents," said CDR Egbe. "In fact, the Pet Evacuation and Transportation Standards (PETS) Act is a federal law that requires states to account for the needs of individuals with pets and service animals when planning and responding to a major disaster or emergency. Animals must be decontaminated after exposure to high



*Georgia State Animal Response Team (SART) Animal Decontamination Station*



*Arial View Vista Forge Full Scale Exercise, Atlanta*

levels of radiation to reduce the likelihood of deaths and protect people from the risk associated with contaminated animals."

The Vista Forge Full-Scale Exercise was executed in Atlanta, Georgia in November 2022. This landmark event brought more than 700 people and 50 agencies together to collaborate, test the emergency response system, and develop communication and decontamination protocols for humans and

animals. Currently, the planning committee is compiling hundreds of pages of data, hot washes, debriefs, and participant feedback to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

The Vista Forge Project is not over. The initiative will be conducted with seven other states over the next few years. Work has already begun with the City of Charlotte North Carolina for the next exercise.



# Encouraging and Promoting Next-Generation Scientists in Public Health

by CAPT Yvette Waples, PharmD, CDR Katherine Won, PharmD, MBA, RAC, CPH, PMP, LCDR Pariban Dhanormchitphong, PharmD, BCPS, PMP; LCDR Alicia Sherrell, DrPH, MPH, and LCDR Keisha Bryan LCSW-C, BCD

The District of Columbia Commissioned Officers Association (DC COA) has a long-standing history of sponsoring a variety of community outreach programs under the DC COA Community Outreach Committee. Among these engagements, our officers have an opportunity every year to judge science fair projects and meet with the middle and high school students that prepared and presented them. These future scientists are motivated to pursue a field in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and are some of the brightest minds in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) area.

As the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic came and went, the format of the science fairs transitioned from 100% in-person to 100% virtual and then to a hybrid format in the past few years. For the 2023 DMV-area science fairs, DC COA participated in eight science fairs. Each fair organizer and host school chose the optimal format for their science fair based on their resources and judgement to adapt to the changing situation of the pandemic. The changes presented challenges not only to students who participated in the science fairs but also to the science fair judges and organizers who coordinate the logistics. The DC COA Science Fair Planning Subcommittee members were quick to pivot and adapt to the changing landscape of the science fairs and figure out how to best advertise the outreach event and encourage officers to participate as judges. The members held meetings and exchanged correspondence to recruit officers, assigned lead judges, and organized the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) judging teams for the eight science fairs. The subcommittee members also

worked with the science fair organizers to coordinate the different judging formats and figure out how to distribute the USPHS award certificates, signed by the DC COA Branch President, and medals to the students of the winning projects.

This year, we recruited over 30 judges and successfully executed the judging of over 800 student research projects in eight regional and county-level science and engineering fairs. USPHS judges reviewed projects in the Medicine and Health category, as well as projects in any other science-related categories they deemed applicable to the public health mission. With guidance provided by the DC COA Science Fair Planning Subcommittee, the lead judge of each science fair coordinated further details on how the judging process would work for their respective science fair. Upon reviewing the students' projects, officer judges provided rankings for the projects they reviewed and conversed with others to determine which projects would be selected as the top three projects for the Distinguished Achievement Award, and as the Meritorious Achievement Award (i.e., honorable mention), where projects demonstrated independent thought, creative ability, and scientific skill in addressing issues relevant to public health. The students were honored by the USPHS recognition - and officer judges were rewarded with the experience of judging such high quality and innovative projects. It was exciting to see many students were interested in current hot topics such as COVID-19-related complications, machine learning for various medical conditions, social media, opioid drug addiction, and wildfire science. By encouraging the youth of today to be excited about science, the DC COA and USPHS can help ensure that future generations are prepared to meet the scientific and public health challenges for years to come, as we know there will be more epidemics and even pandemics in the future.



*CDR Christine Le, LCDR Ji LaRose, and LCDR Marleen Tran*

An outreach event of this magnitude would not have been possible without the successful execution, participation, dedication, and effort put forth by the DC COA Science Fair Planning Subcommittee, lead judges, and volunteer officer judges who represent the DC COA and USPHS. If you are stationed in the DC area and are interested in becoming a science fair judge, keep an eye out for calls for volunteers, which usually happens in February and March of every year. Volunteering as a judge at these regional science fairs is a great opportunity to increase visibility of the USPHS and encourage students to think about a career in the Commissioned Corps, especially with the Corps' ongoing effort to recruit officers to our service. Additionally, other local COA chapters who are interested in emulating this outreach program should contact the DC COA Science Fair Planning Subcommittee (<https://www.dcco.org/community-outreach>) for guidance.

# COA Branches across the Nation Lead the Way in the Virtual Surgeon General's 5k

by LCDR Samora Casimir, OTD, OTR/L

Some USPHS Officers are unable to attend the annual Scientific and Training Symposium and participate in the in-person Surgeon General's 5k run/walk. That's why the Surgeon General's 5k (SG5k) Planning Team makes a great effort to reach out to the COA branches across the nation to host a virtual SG5k within their local COA community. LCDR Samora Casimir serves as the Lead Remote Site Coordinator and contacted the COA Presidents to advertise for USPHS Officers to lead virtual SG5k event within their local COA branches. This year, the Virtual SG5k event was held May 6-13, and had 245 participants complete the event: 145 USPHS Officers, 99 civilians, and 1 Army service member.

Here are a few highlights of the leaders and their group's accomplishments. LT Charles Edge and LT Alexis Roberts were the event leaders for the Atlanta COA branch and gathered 10 USPHS Officers and four civilians. They hosted their event at the Westside Reservoir Park, designed their race route, and even designated a volunteer to ensure the runners remained safe throughout. These event leaders state, "It was a successful event that increased fitness and fellowship. We even provided an opportunity for USPHS Officers to complete their APFTs."

LCDR Nicolett Miller and LT Joon Lee were the event leaders for the North Carolina COA (NCCOA) branch with a total of eight USPHS Officers and six civilians. They hosted their SG5k event at the American Tobacco Trail Park in Durham, NC because of its charming scenic trail with precisely-lined trees. All USPHS officers in this group wore their physical training uniform showing off their USPHS pride. These event leaders report, "The SG5k brought officers together for a fun fitness event. All the participants, even the children, were cheered on demonstrating team spirit and enthusiasm."

Another well-organized virtual SG5k event was held at Buffalo Park in Flagstaff, AZ. LT Andrew Su and LCDR Austin Van Horn were the event leaders for the Grand Canyon and the Little Colorado COA branches. Together, they gathered a terrific team of eight USPHS officers and five civilians. LT Su described, "Our SG5k run definitely enhanced our relationship across both COA branches and we continue to talk about planning more group activities. It also helped different categories get to know one another as we had representation from three different categories: Nurse, Therapist, & Pharmacy".

LCDR Jennifer Manning and LCDR Robbin Tanner did a phenomenal job hosting the Virtual SG5k event for the Four Corners COA (FC-COA) branch. Due to their remote location, these event leaders organized several successful runs to encourage the greatest amount of participation and accommodate people's schedules: Berg Park in Farmington, NM; Centennial Park in Cortez, CO; Four Corners Outpatient Health Center in Teec Nos Pos, AZ; and Northern Navajo Medical Center in Shiprock, NM.



White Mountain COA poses for a group photo after running the Virtual SG 5K



NCCOA poses for a group photo after running the Virtual SG 5K

They were excited to have a total of seven USPHS Officers and 23 civilians. LCDRs Manning and Tanner advertised their event so well within their service unit; they included bright decorations in USPHS colors to include the USPHS flag, provided the runners with refreshments, ran safety education, and demonstrated proper stretching before and after the run. They said "Some individuals haven't been out running since COVID and they were excited to get back out on the trails. We were able to network with other officers and tell the community about the Commissioned Corps. We are in the process of working with other COA branches to lead regular monthly runs."

see **VIRTUAL** continued on page 17



**VIRTUAL** from page 16

Lastly, LCDR Marie Jeoboam and LCDR Hollis Reed led six USPHS officers and 12 civilians for the Catawba COA branch. These event leaders made their virtual SG5k event a fun family affair. LCDR Jeoboam inspired her family to exercise at Greynolds Park in Miami, FL. They wore yellow and blue T-shirts to support USPHS. The Rock Hill, SC group had a memorable time choosing a local walking trail that follows the Catawba River. The Catawba River is important to the Catawba tribe as it has provided travel, food, and water for their nation for over 6000 years. LT Tyler Maanum led a group of four USPHS officers and 15 civilians for the White Mountain COA branch. He chose a stunning park in Sedona, AZ, Bell Trail at the Beaver Creek, because this location has countless walking, running, and hiking trails. LT Maanum said, "This event fostered friendly competition, promoted the health and wellness of the USPHS Officers, the participants, and our community."

The SG5k Planning Team (CDR Matthew Ellis, CDR Rachelle Green, LCDR Bryan Anderson, LCDR Samora Casimir, LCDR Kayla Dewitt, LCDR Jen Eng, and LCDR Austin Van Horn) would like to thank all the event leaders and participants for making this year's Virtual SG5k event such a great success.



Grand Canyon COA poses for a group photo after running the Virtual SG 5K



FC-COA poses for a group photo after running the Virtual SG 5K at Shiprock Berg Park



Atlanta COA poses for a group photo after running the Virtual SG 5K

**AIRLINES** from page 1

boarding pass. Additionally, they may bring up to two baggage pieces for free, and there is no charge for additional pieces of baggage." She reports that Southwest is also evaluating its military fares program.

United Airlines also responded favorably, with Robert Rivkin, Senior Vice President & Chief Legal Officer, assuring that the USPHSCC officers will receive the benefits extended to military customers, including baggage allowances, ticket changes, and boarding priority. United Airlines plans to update its website to reflect this policy change.

However, there has been no response from Delta, American, Sun Country, Horizon, and Republic Airlines. Jet Blue and Hawaiian Airlines are reviewing the request, and Frontier promises us an update soon.

COA welcomes any good news stories from officers who have utilized the benefits offered by Southwest, Spirit, Allegiant, or United Airlines. We remain grateful to the Law Offices of Shannon James and her team for partnering with COA to address this inequity.

We look forward to hearing more success stories as officers take advantage of this long-overdue policy.

Until next month!



# Nursing: Contributions to Public Health and the Way Forward

by LT Tessa Fletcher, DNP, APRN, PMHNP, WCC

As we celebrated Nurses' Week 2023, we recognized and appreciated our nurses, who make up one of the largest professional categories in the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps, and acknowledged the exceptional impact of nursing across the field of public health.

Incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles into professional diversification and multidisciplinary approaches to nursing can lead to a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive healthcare system that benefits patients, healthcare providers, and the community. By embracing DEI principles in nursing practice, nurses can help build a more just and equitable healthcare system that improves health outcomes for all.

Professional diversification in nursing refers to acquiring skills, knowledge, and qualifications related to various areas of nursing practice beyond the traditional roles and responsibilities associated with clinical care. The following are examples of professional diversification in nursing:

- **Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs):** Highly qualified and licensed nurses with a master's or doctorate degree in nursing. Their duties include diagnosing and treating illnesses, prescribing medications, and managing patient care independently or collaboratively with physicians.
- **Nurse Educators:** Assist in developing and enhancing the skills of the next generation of nurses by teaching and training them in clinical settings and academic settings. Besides a graduate degree in nursing education, nurse educators should possess strong communication, management, and teaching skills.
- **Nursing Informatics:** Their role lies at the intersection of healthcare technology. Patient outcomes, clinical workflow, and data management are improved using their healthcare best practices and computer system knowledge. Data analysis, technical work, and strategic thinking are all required to achieve this level of diversification.
- **Certified Nurse-Midwives (CNMs):** Experienced, qualified nurses who provide a full range of healthcare services to women during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period, as well as wellness care. CNMs can work independently or collaborate with physicians or other healthcare professionals, depending on the circumstances.
- **Nurse Researchers:** Highly skilled professionals who conduct scientific investigations to improve nursing practice, patient

outcomes, and public health. The skills they develop are often applied to developing studies, designing interventions, and analyzing healthcare data in academic settings, government agencies, and research centers.

- **Nurse Entrepreneurs:** Create, develop, and manage healthcare businesses or market new products and services in the healthcare market. Combining business and clinical practices is vital to building a successful healthcare company.

While the list above is not all-inclusive, each role contributes to diversification, equity, and inclusion within the realm of public health service delivery.

Multidisciplinary nursing involves collaboration with other healthcare professionals to improve public health. A comprehensive approach to patient care can be achieved by bringing the unique perspectives and expertise of nurses, doctors, and other healthcare professionals together. Public health outcomes can be improved through a multidisciplinary approach in several ways.

Diversity in the nursing workforce can help address healthcare disparities and provide culturally responsive care to diverse patient populations affected by health inequities due to race, sex, sexual orientation, disability, socio-economic status, geographic location, or other societal constructs.

By diversifying the nursing workforce, nurses from different backgrounds can provide more personalized care sensitive to cultural beliefs, values, and practices. This can improve patient satisfaction, treatment adherence, and health outcomes. In addition, it increases access to healthcare resources, education, and career opportunities. Nurses aware of social determinants of health and who advocate for health equity can help improve public health outcomes and reduce healthcare costs, morbidity, and mortality.

Diversification of the nursing profession, equality, and inclusion support the public health of communities through innovation and multidisciplinary collaboration. Inclusion in nursing can improve teamwork, communication, and collaboration among healthcare providers, leading to better patient outcomes. Nurses who feel included and valued are likelier to be engaged and productive, leading to better job satisfaction and retention rates. Additionally, promoting inclusion can help reduce bias and discrimination in healthcare, leading to better patient-provider relationships and health outcomes of the communities we serve.

# PHERST Officers Partner with Access Housing Inc and Washington DC Veterans Affairs Medical Center on Memorial Day.

by LT Catherine Lamptey and LT Tessa Fletcher

Officers of the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps (USPHS), Washington DC (DC) Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC), and Access Housing Inc. have had a long-existing relationship. For over eight years, USPHS Commissioned Corps officers have supported homeless veterans by facilitating multiple events, including Thanksgiving dinners, cold weather boots drive, health fairs, Memorial Day luncheons, and baby showers for homeless female veterans. All these events would not have been possible had it not been for one officer's ongoing passion for supporting the valiant men and women who have served our nation. CAPT Stephanie Felder's dedication to supporting homeless veterans with the collaboration of Mr. Elmore Walter from Access Housing Inc built a partnership for community and civic event coordination. Since 2015, they have developed multiple opportunities for USPHS Commissioned Corps officers in the DC metropolitan area and around the country.

Most recently, on May 24, 2023, a team of USPHS Commissioned Corps officers from the Public Health Emergency Response Strike Team (PHERST) were privileged to volunteer to support this year's Memorial Day events. Memorial Day was formerly Decoration Day—dedicated to decorating the graves of our men and women who died in the civil war. The first recorded public celebration of this event was on May 30, 1868, at Arlington National Cemetery. Currently, Memorial Day events are celebrated nationwide and worldwide in honor of our fallen men and women. We joined our

distinguished service members in the Access House Veterans Department as part of the Memorial Day celebrations. USPHS Commissioned Corps officers in charge of the day's activity organized and planned the event with flawless execution. Board members, community leaders, and veterans participated in the ceremony in commemoration of the honorable men and women who had given the utmost sacrifice to serve our nation.

The keynote speakers, Commander Stephanie Felder of PHERST and Lieutenant Colonel Jason R. Secrest of the United States Army reminded the attendees of factors affecting veterans and the need for housing in DC to support safe living conditions. They also highlighted the importance of access to care to address both the active and silent casualties of war—mental health needs such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, (PTSD), substance abuse, and internal scars of war that lead to suicide. Approximately 13% of veterans are affected by homelessness. The speakers encouraged our commitment to work harder, as no veteran should be without housing or unsure how to access the care to which they are entitled. As a nation, we are all beneficiaries of their sacrifice. Commander Felder reiterated, "The battle doesn't always end when the fighting stops; for many, a new, less visible war begins. A war often fought in silence, away from the world's prying eyes."

Since Memorial Day is a day of solemn honor, profound thanks, and steadfast commitment, it is pertinent that current active-duty officers also consider ways to give back to society, especially our veterans. [Click here](#) to see a video of the Memorial Day Service.

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## LEGISLATIVE from page 2

the introduction of her Parity for Public Health Service Ready Reserve Act, which would codify the structure of the RRC in statute, enabling access to benefits and entitlements afforded to Reserve Component servicemembers of all other uniformed services. Provisions of that bill would:

- Authorize the PHSCC RRC to have the same dual compensation and leave rights as those of the Armed Forces so all citizens, whether their primary job is working in the private sector or for the Federal government, can go on military leave with pay
- Extend Post-9/11 GI Bill and Montgomery GI Bill educational benefits to PHSCC RRC once they meet time-in-service requirements
- Expand the Reserve Forces Policy Board to include representation of PHSCC
- Authorize funding to allow for sustainment, recruitment and retention of officers for the PHSCC RRC

This bill is endorsed by the Military Officers Associations of America (MOAA), Commissioned Officers Association (COA), Reserve Officers Association (ROA), and U.S. Coast Guard Chief Petty Officers Association and Enlisted Association.

Dave was also able to present Senator Duckworth's team with COA's Public Health Congressional Leadership Award that was awarded earlier this year for the Senator's efforts in last year.

Providing 12 weeks of parental leave, in parity with the armed forces, NOAA Corps, and some civil servants, is the other issue that COA is working diligently to address. Again, you all know that the FY 22 NDAA provided for 12 weeks of parental leave; specifically, under Section 701 of Chapter 40 of Title 10, a member of the armed forces is allowed up

to a total of 12 weeks of parental leave during the one-year period beginning after the birth or adoption of a child of the member and in order to care for such child, and the placement of a minor child with the member for adoption or long-term foster care. Members of the NOAA Commissioned Officer Corps receive the same parental leave as members of the armed forces because of a provision in Section 3071 of Title 33 that grants them Title 10 Chapter 40 leave. In addition, Civil Service employees may be eligible for 12 weeks of parental leave under FEPLA and FMLA (see this explanation). Taylor Strategies and Dave have been meeting with the staff of several Representatives and Senators to right this wrong, including the staff of the Senate Health, Labor, Education, and Pensions Committee.



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# Spiritual Wellness

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## Spiritual COER

Don't panic! This is NOT a new requirement (LOL)!! I am approaching my one-year anniversary of serving in a ministry role at my church. As I was reflecting on my past year of service and looking at the September religious Holy days calendar, I noted a common theme of review, improvements, and goal setting. Is that really necessary? Let's talk about that!

Many of the different belief systems incorporate this as a part of their practices. One word that came up in my study was "atonement." This term is used primarily in Christianity and Judaism. Atonement generally means to make reparations for an offense or an injury. In a spiritual context, atonement is necessary to not only maintain a healthy spiritual walk, but to grow spiritually, as well.

Yom Kippur is a time when followers of Judaism take stock of their lives, ask forgiveness from friends and family, and take steps toward self-improvement for the year to come. This is a valuable practice for all spiritual walks. Just as we take care to note our USPHS accomplishments throughout the fiscal year, and we set goals to improve in the next year, we should be looking at our spiritual walk the same way. What spiritual disciplines did you practice this year? Were they diverse? What was the impact on your spiritual walk? Did it impact the lives of the people around you? What spiritual goals did you accomplish and what goals do you hope to accomplish next year?

As USPHS officers, we all know the value of having an impressive COER. It shows our leadership what we are doing and how we are growing. This same principle can be applied spiritually to enhance our relationship with our spiritual leader and to grow in our journey. We earn a new level of spiritual understanding when we take the time to treat our spiritual life as we would our professional lives. Failing to demonstrate the benchmarks of our spiritual walk puts us at risk of losing our good standing with our leadership or even our commission.

May we all strive to be in the top quartile in our spiritual wellness and, by doing so, enrich our lives and the lives of those that we encounter. My thoughts and prayers are with you all.



### Education: Nayrouz

September 11 – Coptic New Year: A feast day (also called Nayrouz) that commemorates martyrs and confessors in Coptic Orthodox Christianity.

### Spiritual Exercises

1. Journal Article: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3154991>
2. Website: [www.c4israel.org/teachings/coming-to-terms-with-your-neighbour-and-with-god/?gclid=EA1a1QobChMlwdqf\\_rKtgAMVD4r1Ch3dfg0xEAAyAAEgKRMPD\\_BwE](http://www.c4israel.org/teachings/coming-to-terms-with-your-neighbour-and-with-god/?gclid=EA1a1QobChMlwdqf_rKtgAMVD4r1Ch3dfg0xEAAyAAEgKRMPD_BwE)
3. Book: The Atonement by Leon Morris (1984)
4. Start a spiritual journal. Record your accomplishments, growing edges, and goals for one year. Review them with a leader in your belief system and seek ways in which you can improve.

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

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