



SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY GROUP OF THE COMMISSIONED
CORPS OF THE US PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

SWPAG NEWSLETTER

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2010 Meetings

SWPAG	HS-PAC
June 17	June 4
Sept 9	Aug 6
Dec 9	Oct 1
	Dec 3

SWPAG Newsletter
created by
LCDR Christopher Cline
LT Christina Coriz
LT Jonathan White

USPHS SCIENTIFIC AND TRAINING SYMPOSIUM

San Diego, California May 24-27, 2010

[AGENDA AT A GLANCE](#)

[TUESDAY \(CATEGORY/PROFESSION-SPECIFIC\) AGENDAS](#)

SWPAG Dinner at the COF Conference:

The SWPAG dinner will be held at 8PM on Tuesday, May 25, at the Boathouse Restaurant, 2040 Harbor Island Drive, San Diego. If you have any questions, or wish to participate, please contact LT Jonathan White at: whitejo@cc.nih.gov. The restaurant is a 10-12 minute walk from the Sheraton. Dress for the restaurant is casual.

<http://www.boathouserestaurant.com/>

The mission of the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps is to protect, promote, and advance the health and safety of our Nation



“Support COA, Support Others, Support Yourself!”

By LCDR Julie A. Niven

On the front page of the November 2009 issue of NASW News, NASW Executive Elizabeth Clark is quoted as saying that “advocacy is the cornerstone of the [social work] profession.” Another of the primary values of social work is working for social justice. Reading each month’s *Commissioned Officers Association (COA) Frontline*, I notice that Jerry Farrell, COA’s Executive Director, promotes the same values as we social workers do by tirelessly advocating for the USPHS and fighting for our rights and privileges in his work at COA. Mr. Farrell, retired Navy, is an indefatigable champion of the USPHS, and serves as an example of leadership in his work on behalf of the USPHS. Mr. Farrell and the other COA Frontline staffs inspire me to ask myself, *what more can I do to support and promote the Corps?*

One way to support and promote the Corps is to contribute to the various PAC, PAG and agency newsletters within HHS. When I read in the September 2009 issue of *COA Frontline* that membership in COA is down, I decided to write an article for the SW-PAG Newsletter to encourage my fellow social workers who are not currently members of COA to investigate the myriad benefits of membership. COA is the primary organization that fights for our rights and privileges as USPHS officers, showcases our successes, and provides abundant support for who we are and what we do. Some of the many benefits of COA include representation on the Capitol Hill, local representation, the COA Annual Meeting, opportunities to participate in discounted insurance programs, the monthly newsletter *COA Frontline*, the COA scholarship program, a discount on a subscription to *Public Health Reports*, and much more.

One of the benefits I find most enjoyable is feeling that I am a part of an effort larger than myself through my membership in COA. I find satisfaction in knowing I am supporting a quality organization that supports me. And I find many opportunities to support the Corps through COA. Writing articles about experiences in the field, volunteering at the annual conference, running for a board seat, these are just a few of the various ways I (and any of us) can work to promote the Corps. This article is my present effort to support fellow officers through encouragement to join and benefit from membership in COA. As social workers we know that Mr. Farrell is correct when he says, *the more we are, the louder our voice, and the more effective our effort.*

The March 2010 issue of *COA Frontline* details a meeting between VADM Regina Benjamin, Surgeon General and Mr. Farrell to discuss issues pertinent to the USPHS. VADM Benjamin is reported in the front page article to have emphasized “the importance of professional associations like COA” and encouraged officers to “join and support associations that support them.”

So in conclusion, I encourage you to go to the COA website (<http://www.coausphs.org/index.cfm>), check out all the news and information found there, join for one year, and read *Frontline* monthly. I feel certain that doing this will not only increase your pride in officership, but convince you to renew your membership at year’s end. And like me, I believe you will find inspiration among the pages of *Frontline* and understand why I encourage you all to support COA, support others, support yourself!

Aide de Camp for U.S. Surgeon General VADM Benjamin

by LCDR Tina Bryant

Shortly after her nomination by President Barack Obama to the position of U.S. Surgeon General, VADM Regina M. Benjamin, MD, MBA, visited Houston, Texas on November 6-7, 2009 to attend the American Medical Association (AMA) House of Delegates Meeting. The weeklong conference was held at the George R. Brown Convention Center in downtown Houston. LCDR Hung Phan and I were both honored to serve as her Aides de Camp. We provided transportation to and from the airport and the hotel, and escorted her and her media spokesperson, Dori Salcido, throughout the conference center during their brief visit. VADM Benjamin greeted several caucuses holding meetings simultaneously at the convention center and was congratulated by a multitude of medical colleagues as the nation's 18th Surgeon General.

This was the 221st Meeting of the House of Delegates with physicians representing the nation. On Saturday, November 7, 2009, VADM Benjamin addressed the delegates to formally withdraw her name from candidacy for the AMA Board of Trustees. In a brief speech, she announced becoming the next Surgeon General of the United States. Dr. Benjamin credited the House for preparing her for her new job. Dr. Benjamin declared her view that patients come first as the reason she agreed to go to Washington to become the family physician for 300 million Americans.

I appreciate the opportunity afforded me by the Aide de Camp role to experience firsthand the degree to which VADM Benjamin exemplifies warmth, compassion, and knowledge. From this encounter with the newly-nominated Surgeon General, I was readily convinced that the experience and leadership she brings will advance the mission of the U.S. Public Health Service and improve the health of our nation.



Mescalero Deployment

By CAPT Julia Dunaway, MHT-3 Deputy Team Leader

December 19, 2009-January 3, 2010

USPHS Mental Health Team 3 (MHT-3) was on call for the month of December and received notification of the Mescalero Apache Mission in November. This mission resulted from a request by CDR Dorlynn Simmons, (Social Worker) and the Mescalero Indian Health Services Hospital Chief Executive Officer. After an extremely high rate of suicide attempts during 2009 and several recent completed suicides (four of the individuals under the age of 18), CDR Simmons requested an emergency community assessment from IHS Area and Headquarters staff. LCDR Betty Hastings (Social Worker), CDR Simmons and the rest of the IHS assessment team completed the assessment on October 16, 2009; the Mescalero Apache Tribe declared a "state of emergency" on October 19, 2009 and the first mental health team (MHT-2), hit the ground November 21, 2009.

Two rotations of four Officers would need to be deployed for the month of December. No problem getting the first team together, however it was not as simple gathering together people for the holiday rotation (Christmas and New Year). CAPT Guy Mahoney (Social Worker), MHT-3 Team Leader and CDR Lisa Dolan, MHT-3, Deputy Team Leader, immediately volunteered, as did LCDR Karen Hearod (Social Worker) and CAPT Maurice Sheehan. Not wanting CDR Dolan, to miss Christmas with her children, I volunteered to go in her stead as my children are older. My family was not thrilled with my holiday season absence but they knew we could celebrate when I returned in January.

We received detailed information from LCDR Betty Hastings from the

very start, including a comprehensive Mescalero Apache Mission Pre deployment Briefing Notebook which included information about the deployment, Officer expectations, and the local area. The IHS Albuquerque Area Office representative, Mr. Jerry Lee, provided outstanding support for all the travel arrangements.

Prior to our departure we had a conference call with the on-scene team, MHT-3 Team #2. It was helpful to hear their experiences prior to our travel in two days, particularly knowing the details of how we would get from the El Paso, Texas airport to the Mescalero reservation.

When I arrived in El Paso I immediately spotted CAPT Maurice Sheehan because he, as always, was traveling uniform. We located LCDR Karen Hearod and set off to get our bags. We did not find CAPT Guy Mahoney and heard later from Jerry Lee that his flight was cancelled due to the big storm in the Washington DC area. He would be arriving on Monday, December 21. In the meantime, as Deputy Team Leader I would be Officer-in-Charge (OIC) until his arrival. Our team would consist of three social workers and CAPT Sheehan, a nurse practitioner. I was looking forward to working with CAPT Mahoney again and getting to know LCDR Hearod and CAPT Sheehan.

Just as we were wondering how we would find the people coming to meet us we spotted two women who were looking around, Helen Chavez and Merilee Garcia. When they saw us they knew we were the arriving team and they cheerfully showed us to their van. The two and a half hour drive to the reservation was an opportunity to ask a lot of questions about the area and progress made during the deployment. Helen and Merilee are the assis-

tants to the incident commander, CDR Dorlynn Simmons, and were the most accommodating, helpful individuals throughout the deployment.

Upon our arrival to the Inn of the Mountain Gods-- yes I know this does not sound like a hardship deployment, but we were there during the holiday--we had a chance to get settled in before a meeting with the departing Team 2, consisting of MHT-3 members, LCDR Vicki Ingram, LCDR Margie Mahool, LT Tracy Powell (Social Worker), and Team Leader, CAPT Patricia Nye, a Tier 3 psychiatrist. Team 2 provided a detailed briefing about their experiences along with many helpful written documents. I'll have to admit the briefing was somewhat overwhelming after just arriving there and feeling somewhat disoriented. We were provided with vehicle keys and directions to the IHS hospital for our Sunday orientation briefings. We spent Sunday learning about the community, getting trained on the Electronic Health Record, and speaking with IHS staff about the history and current status of the Mescalero Apache Tribe. We were given emergency contact information and instructions on how to handle emergencies during the upcoming absence of the sole mental health provider. Between the deployment briefing binder, advance conference call, departing team briefing, and orientation on Sunday I felt very prepared to begin working on Monday morning. LCDR Hastings is to be commended for her organizational efforts.

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Given the goals for our two week period which were coverage of the mental health clinic, outreach to the law enforcement and emergency responders, program reviews of various reservation programs, and other community outreach activities, we divided our team into two parts. CAPT Sheehan and LCDR Hearod would provide mental health clinic coverage and I would work on the community outreach part. CAPT Mahoney would join me in the community outreach after his arrival and orientation.

We would start and end each day with a briefing at the mental health clinic with CDR Simmons and Ms. Chavez and Ms. Garcia. After getting settled in the clinic Monday morning, CDR Simmons took us on a tour of the reservation, educating us about the various housing areas, school, facilities, and services. This was extremely helpful in preparing us for the coming days when we would be transporting ourselves from place to place. On Tuesday we met with the Bureau of Indian Affairs Police Department and the Emergency Medical Services providers and staff at the MA Fire and Rescue station. CDR Simmons facilitated a discussion on the process of responding to suicidal behaviors both during and after the incidents. Both the BIA police and the EMS were anxious to have the opportunity to meet with Team 3 providers to discuss their personal concerns relative to the events taking place in the community. They were in favor of one-on-one, rather than group, debriefings. CAPT Mahoney and I would start conducting these debriefings over the next few days. While CAPT Sheehan and LCDR Hearod saw clients at the clinic CAPT Mahoney and I conducted some community outreach visits. LCDR Hearod's (LCDR Hearod is an IHS employee) expertise with the Electronic Health Record was a real asset throughout the deployment. On Tuesday evening we all attended a community holiday event in which gift bags were passed out to elders and children at the Girls and Boys Club.

LCDR Hearod and I were asked to help hand out the gifts to the elderly. In our PHS uniforms we stood out and all felt positively received by the community throughout the evening. Wednesday morning we awoke to a heavy snowfall and a call from CDR Simmons to wait until later in the day to make the trip in to the mental health clinic, a 15 minute drive in good conditions, but not so easy in the snow.

We made it to the clinic but no clients braved the weather. We had trouble driving back to the hotel after another period of fresh snow. On Christmas Eve the clinic parking lot was covered in ice and although we made the trip in, we had no clients. Parking lots at the BIA police and EMS were icy with very few cars.

We had a couple emergency phone calls but generally spent the afternoon looking at the beautiful winter wonderland outside the windows of the hotel. On Christmas day I accompanied a BIA police officer on a ride-along. Spending time with the officer was very informative and helpful in deepening my understanding of the community and the issues impacting them. The other team members handled emergency on-call issues.

Later in the day we treated ourselves to the Gathering of Nations Christmas Dinner at the hotel buffet restaurant.

Our second week started with a schedule of program reviews. CDR Simmons, CAPT Mahoney and I visited the Community Health Representative Program, Injury Prevention, Substance Abuse, and Patient Benefits Coordinator during the week. CDR Simmons' goal was to identify potential funding resources for suicide prevention services. Meanwhile the mental health clinic team members were busy seeing urgent clients, including some who were suicidal and later admitted for hospitalization. CAPT Mahoney and I conducted one-on-one sessions with the BIA police officers, all of whom were responsive to the opportunity to discuss their own experiences with the suicides and the conditions in the community. Their ideas regarding the causes and solutions to the suicide incidents were recorded to be passed on to CDR Simmons.

The week ended with CAPT Mahoney going on a ride-along with the BIA police on New Year's Eve. To avoid any possible "celebratory" gun activity at midnight, the police officer parked at the Inn of the Mountain Gods. Friday, New Year's Day, CAPT Sheehan reported he was not feeling well. He requested several bottles of water and did not want to have dinner with us. By Saturday morning we were very concerned because his symptoms had worsened and he couldn't keep anything down. We checked on him early afternoon and when he could hardly stand up to talk to us we made the decision to take him to the emergency room. We had some hours of worrying while he was re-hydrated and later admitted. Unfortunately, he could not leave on Sunday with the rest of us, but he did leave on Monday, health scare resolved. I mention this because it illustrates how important team members are to one another. Helping others is important but we also have to keep an eye on our own members. Deploying with fellow social workers was an experience I'll never forget. I have so much respect and affection for CDR Dorlynn Simmons and her excellent assistants, Helen and Merilee, who never complained, were always there to help us, and exhibited their unconditional faith in the Mescalero people.



Announcements

SWPAG subcommittee chairs for 2010

Mentoring	LCDR Todd Lennon (second term)
Awards	LCDR Kristin Kelly
Recruitment & Retention	CDR Dale Thompson
Readiness	LCDR Nicole Gaskin-Laniyan
Communications	LCDR Christopher Cline
Career Development	LCDR Jerry Mahlau-Heinert (second term)
Policy	LCDR Tarsha Wilson
Membership	LCDR Scott Eppler

JOIN OUR MEETINGS

Join us for SWPAG's 2010 meetings via teleconference or in person. Our next meeting is June 17, 2010. Call in information, TBA. If you would like to meet in-person, we will be at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) Room 6-1029, 1 Choke Cherry Road, Rockville MD 20857

Remember to email your attendance to the SWPAG Secretary LT Kelley Smith,
Kelley.Smith@SAMHSA.hhs.gov

Interested in learning more about the OFRD Teams?
 Go to the OFRD website at <http://ccrf.hhs.gov/ccrf/current%20teams.htm>

We're on the web

http://usphs-hso.org/pags/swpag/swpag_main.shtml

Contact [LCDR Christopher Cline](#) if you are interested in contributing to a future Issue of the SWPAG Newsletter