



# SENIOR ADVISOR MESSAGE

Volume 1, Issue 1 | February 2021

Hello Junior Officers,

I am writing what I plan on being a routine communication to Junior Officers (JOs). I plan on doing this on a quarterly basis. However, there may be times that I write more often. I do not have a particular agenda, but I do want to be able to provide timely advice and pertinent guidance on a variety of topics. I am open to suggestions from JOs and I want to hear from you. Please let me know if you would like to learn more about a topic, want advice on a topic, or have a different perspective. Also, I may bring in another Senior Officer from time-to-time to co-author part of an article. For this initial column I want to touch upon three topics that I think are pertinent to this time of year to all JOs: Change, COVID-19 Vaccine, and Career Planning.

## Change

As we enter the new year, we have a lot of change: a new administration with a pending new Health & Human Services Secretary, new Assistant Secretary for Health, new Surgeon General, and new Office of the Surgeon General staff. What does this mean to you? It depends on your perspective. As many of you have heard before, the only constant is change. Nothing lasts forever so we can expect leadership of the Corps to change over time. With these changes we may see shifts on areas of public health priorities. This is natural. However, the mission of the Corps remains: *to protect, promote, and advance the health and safety of our Nation*. We achieve this mission through *rapid and effective response to public health needs, leadership and excellence in public health practices, and advancement of public health science*. So, going back to my original question, "What does this mean to you?" It means we expect officers to continue to advance the mission, pay attention to what our leadership feels we should focus on, and carry out those duties with the leadership and excellence the Corps is known for.

## COVID-19 and the Vaccine

Everyone in the nation has been touched by COVID-19 in one way or another. PHS Officers, like most of the medical community, have worked endless hours to deliver rapid response, provide leadership, and advance science on SARS-CoV-2 (see our mission above). I thank all of you for the efforts you have provided in battling this virus. I know many of you have worked endless hours already. However, with the distribution of the vaccine we must ask for even more from our officers. Once again, the Corps is being asked to provide more leadership on this issue. I view leadership on the vaccine in three areas: education, awareness and response, and an example.

**Education** – As an officer, I hope you are informed on the different vaccines and their safety and effectiveness. If you are not, please, **educate yourself**. I expect all officers to be capable in engaging in effective conversations with family, friends, colleagues, and promote vaccine uptake. Part of this education is in the recently released "COVID-19 Vaccines Knowledge Course" in the Commissioned Corps Learning Management System.



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Vaccine uptake is essential for us to get to herd immunity. Many people are still unsure if they should receive the vaccine and have expressed hesitancy or think they should not receive the vaccine. The challenge is to have **meaningful conversations** with individuals, listen to their concerns, and direct them to facts that will help them to (hopefully) accept the vaccine - think motivational interviewing.

**Awareness and Response** – As with all public health emergencies, we can continue to expect messaging and requests from Commissioned Corps Headquarters (CCHQ). Officers should **remain vigilant** and monitor their emails from CCHQ and provide appropriate responses in a timely fashion.

**Example** – Earlier in this column I referred to the part of our mission that includes leadership. Sometimes leadership is by example. If we are asking people to get vaccinated and promoting uptake, we must be willing to **lead by example** and become vaccinated ourselves. If you have not already received the COVID-19 vaccine, I request you review the message to all officers written on 1/27/2021 by RADM Orsega encouraging all PHS officers to complete the full COVID-19 vaccine series.

## Career Planning

I realize we have talked about two other significant topics: change and COVID-19. And I would encourage you to ensure you have balance in your life whenever possible which, includes time away from your job. We need our officers at their peak and sometimes that means stepping away to taking care of yourself. From a professional standpoint, it also means continuing your career development.

Career planning is ongoing and should be a continuing effort by every officer. With the new year it is an opportune time to look at one's career and review your progression on that plan. Are you happy with your professional trajectory or is it time to rethink where you are going? Are you developing skills that will help you attain your professional goals? Do you have a mentor? Are they helping you? Is your curriculum vitae (CV) up to date? Does your professional development make sense on your CV (sometimes we think we have a direction but when we look at our CV, it says something different)? These are just a few questions I encourage you to ask yourself.

Note that I did not ask any questions relating to promotion. Promotion should never be a primary endpoint and should occur because you have progressed professionally as an officer. In other words, **professional development and growth in leadership should drive promotion**, not the other way around.

I am running out of space for this month. I will continue to write a little about growth and development with each future message. In the meantime, feel free to forward ideas and questions that you want to know more about. I would also ask you to continue to send in concerns about policy and other issues for the JOAG leadership to advocate for you to CCHQ.

Stay safe and thank you for all you do.

Respectfully,



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