



## SWPAG Newsletter

# Semper Servientes

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Communications Chair, Editor-in-Chief

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Communications Co-Chair

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CDR Scott Eppler, LCSW-BCD

2015 SWPAG Chair

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LCDR Cetoute, LCSW, BCD

&

LT Keisha Bryan, LCSW-C, BCD

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CDR Robert E. Van Meir

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2022 SWPAG Chair

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LCSW, BCD, CCHP

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LCSW, BCD, CCHP-MH, CCTP

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# Deployment Cultural Competency When curiosity helps the cat

By CDR Scott Eppler, LCSW-BCD  
Officer-in-Charge  
Soldier Recovery Unit  
Ft. Riley, KS

It has been said, “Curiosity killed the cat!” In the case of deploying and assisting people from another culture nothing could be further from the truth. During my last deployment in support of Operation Allies Welcome in conjunction with Ft. Bliss, TX Afghani refugee resettlement operation, I learned this firsthand. On day two on the ground at the camp the team to which I was assigned was provided with one interpreter for each team member. This outstanding interpreter team was comprised of four men and one woman. It is critical to have female interpreters on your team to help facilitate sharing in greater comfort to do so by Afghani women. How do I know this? I asked. As social workers we are curious of other people groups and their culture.



When I began the mission, I knew virtually nothing about Afghan culture. So as time permitted, I engaged the interpreters with questions. These included topics such as cultural mores, values, and perspectives on mental health, specifically seeking help; other questions included topics of dress, language, greetings, and how different ages and genders are perceived. I asked how the expectations of these differences compare or contrast across their country and in the specific Afghan regions. The answers from the translators were so helpful and crucial to my mission success. I was privileged to provide care to the Afghan people. I found the Afghani people to be beautiful in so many ways. Graciously they accepted the help provided in the face of deaths of beloved family members, the loss of their customary way of life, and geographic separation from their friends and loved ones.



LT Keisha Bryan, LCSW-C, BCD. &  
CAPT Robert Marietta, MD, psychiatrist, team chief

In the future, if you have an OAW deployment opportunity serving afghanis, here are a few suggestions for initial cohesion and success in social work practice. Ask open-ended questions. Be honest about your own lack of knowledge of their culture. Be humble and willing to learn from both the translators and patients. Ask for clarification of what you may not understand. Be thankful and show appreciation. With these simple skills, I learned valuable improvement the service provided to the Afghani refugees. I found, in these ways, curiosity indeed helped the cat.



## Courtesy & Protocol Tips: Saluting

By CDR Robert E. Van Meir  
LCSW, BCD, CCHP-MH, CCTP  
Supervisory,  
Behavioral Health Provider  
ICE Health Services Corps (IHSC)  
Eloy Detention Center, AZ

The salute is not simply an honor exchanged. It is a privileged gesture of respect and trust among soldiers. Remember the salute is not only prescribed by regulation but is also recognition of each other's commitment, abilities, and professionalism.

Some historians believe the hand salute began in late Roman times when assassinations were common. A citizen who wanted to see a public official had to approach with his right hand raised to show that he did not hold a weapon. Knights in armor raised visors with the right hand when meeting a comrade. This practice gradually became a way of showing respect and, in early American history, sometimes involved removing the hat. By 1820, the motion was modified to touching the hat, and since then it has become the hand salute used today. You salute to show respect toward an officer, flag, or our country.



The way you salute says a lot about you as an officer. A proud, smart salute shows pride in yourself and in the USPHS and that you are confident in your abilities as an officer. A sloppy salute might mean that you lack confidence, or at the very least, that you haven't learned how to salute correctly.



When to Salute –

When approaching a Senior Officer.

When saluted by Junior Officer or enlisted personnel.

Upon command. "Present, arms".

When the Pledge of Allegiance is recited at civilian events outdoors.

During an indoor promotion or award/ ceremonies when the proceedings call for an exchange of salutes.



When passing a senior officer walking in the same direction, the subordinate holds he salute when abreast stating, "by your leave, Sir/Ma'am", the senior officer returns the salute with "carry on" or "very well".

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## Innovative Readiness Training: An Opportunity to Support and Protect People Living in Impoverished Communities

By LCDR Cetoute, LCSW, BCD  
ADAPT Program Manager  
9th Medical Group  
Beale AFB, CA

LT Keisha Bryan, LCSW-C, BCD  
Walter Reed National Military  
Medical Center  
Bethesda, MD

What is the Innovative Readiness Training (IRT)? A Department of Defense real-world operational military deployment readiness and job-specific training support no-cost medical care for impoverished communities across the United States. The medical care includes vision exams with free glasses, dental exams with extractions, and medical services to include physicals and behavioral health. It allows you to practice your skills and gain perspective while impacting a grander scale. This article will detail the first IRT that the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) had an opportunity to be a part of among the sister services, including Air National Guard, Army National Guard, Marine Corps Reserve, Air Force Reserve, Air Force, and Navy. By the conclusion of this article, you will learn about the kind of experience you may have in an IRT and become interested in being part of future missions.



LCDR Cetoute, LCSW, BCD

The 2021 IRT locations occurred throughout the United States. However, this article will focus on what happened in the Delta Wellness mission that provided medical care in southeast Arkansas (Lake Village, AR), northeast Louisiana (Lake Providence, LA), and northern Mississippi (Greenville, MS) from 6 July - 20 July 2021. Ten USPHS officers served among well over three hundred members of the armed forces. Specifically, the Preparedness and Exercises Team Lead supported the nine officers placed at the three locations. In addition, the group consisted of a range of medical professions that included pharmacists, nurses, public health, and behavioral health providers.



The Delta Wellness IRT mission provided care to three impoverished locations for that region. Lake Providence, LA, is a small town located in the northeast part of the state with 7,459 and a 37.6% poverty rate.

Innovative Readiness, continues pg. 6



Greenville, MS, is located in the northern part of the state with 29,670 people and a poverty rate of 37.3%. Lastly, Lake Village, AR, has 2,294 people with an 18.7% poverty rate. By the end of the mission, there were a total of 2,586 patients seen, with services valued at \$897,593. Of that total, there were 1,332 glasses made and 991 prescriptions filled. Across the three sites, there were 1370 behavioral health (BH) contacts. Specifically, the BH providers offered services to approximately 53% of the people served.



LT Keisha Bryan, LCSW-C, BCD

The location of care occurred at high schools in each region. All service members lived and provided care to the community from the high school sites. Members in-processed on 6 July 21 and spent the first few days devoted to prepping the site by setting up their living quarters and medical equipment. Patient care occurred from 9 - 17 July 2021, usually from 0700 - 1700. And in-between patient care, there were opportunities for individuals to participate in various deployment training exercises. The last few days until the out-process date of 20 July consisted of breaking down the equipment, cleaning, and a closing ceremony.

The living quarters consisted of everyone sleeping on cots in a classroom that included a minimum of 5 people. Room assignments were according to grade (i.e., officers and enlisted) and sex. All meals occurred on-site, which offered many opportunities to sit together and get to know one another. In addition, there was free time in the evenings until lights out at 2300 to relax and socialize. The free time consisted of roommate group conversations, movie nights, volleyball games, and group workout sessions that encouraged camaraderie.

The behavioral health support team included two USPHS Social Workers and a National Guard Psychologist placed at the individual sites. They were there to provide Force Health Protection to fellow service members and patient care to the community members. Specifically, they offered behavioral health resources and individual therapy sessions. In addition, in partnership with the Chaplains of the Air National Guard, the service members were trained on suicide prevention.



IRT increased access to behavioral health care, which would not have been possible otherwise. The behavioral health resources included information on grief and loss, depression, anxiety, stress management, and managing children diagnosed with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and other behavioral health disorders. At the Lake Village, AR location, 953 patients were served, with 382 behavioral health contacts, which equated to approximately 40% of the population served.



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At Greenville, MS, a total of 958 people were served, and of that, 553 were provided behavioral health care, which equated to about 58%. Lastly, at Lake Providence, LA, there were 675 people served, with a total of 435 people were provided behavioral health resources or support, which was 64% of the patients served.



It was heart-breaking seeing the meager resources available in the communities. For example, Lake Providence, Louisiana, the poorest town, did not have behavioral health agencies in the community. Specifically, the community had one behavioral health provider for elementary, middle, and high school students. It is very challenging for that one person to meet the need. As a result, many people would have to travel over 50 miles for mental health services or did not engage at all. As one can imagine, many did not have the financial resources to drive many miles or participate in telehealth services.

Aside from the opportunity for practice that positively impacts the community, the IRT is a fantastic opportunity to broaden awareness of USPHS and create new professional relationships across the services. For some, IRT was the first time they met a USPHS officer, and in Lake Village, we held an information session to share the USPHS mission, vision, what we do and where we work. Overall, it was terrific having opportunities to talk about the work and impact of USPHS. Also, it was a lot of fun meeting other service members and creating longer-term personal connections.



Future IRT missions need behavioral health providers. If accepted to be part of an IRT, come prepared to work hard and be willing to make it an impactful and fun time for those you serve in the community and the service members working alongside you. It is good to engage positively, flexibly, and open-mindedly to help it be an overall positive and fulfilling IRT experience. The USPHS officers who participated successfully shared their areas of expertise to enhance the Delta Wellness mission, and you too can experience it at future missions.





## My First 6 Months

By LT Regena Hardy, MSW, LISW-S,  
LCSW, BCD, CCHP  
Behavioral Health Provider  
IHSC, Eloy Detention Center, AZ

I completed my first six months as a Commissioned Officer in the USPHS! As I look back over the past six months, I can truly say that it's been an interesting journey!



I can still recall the questions and extended conversations that took place with my family/friends when I shared with them my plan of joining the USPHS. It worried many that I would leave the Department of Veterans Affairs and move from North Carolina to Arizona with the goal to serve on the front lines of public health amid the COVID-19 pandemic! Honesty, I had no frame of reference of the CORPS which made it difficult to get the buy-in from my family. Regardless, I made the decision to make the sacrifice, that I am sure many Officers can relate, and move forward with the plan. After crossing my six-month milestone in uniform, I can honestly admit that I have NO regrets!!!

While I have no regrets, I humbly admit that I was not prepared for the Corps or desert living! Arizona is a different kind of hot. Within the last six months, I have gotten very acquainted with regular three-digit-heat temps, minimum greenery, a ton of large foreign bugs and creatures, free roaming livestock and the infamous Monsoon season. Talk about culture shock!!!! Imagine my relief when I arrived to find that I would be working alongside a Psych RN (Kimberly Skelley) who had also relocated from the east coast having just left the Department of Veterans Affairs. Having that comradery made the transition much easier. While RN Skelley helped me to easily transition into the role (to include the system), my LCDR Van Meir was absolutely amazing in helping me to adjust to the Corps!

Having come from a family of Veterans, I know the importance of having the right supports around you as you serve. Within the first six months, our team excelled quickly. RN Skelley and I worked very well with each other. She had even taken on the task of keeping me well informed of various things to do while in Arizona. She also kept me educated on things to look out for as well. I must honestly admit that she had quickly become a friend and great colleague. She made my "shock" bearable as she almost represented that which had been so familiar to me. My heart truly ached when I found out that she was killed in an automobile accident after leaving work a few weeks back! Just as I was starting to feel somewhat adjusted to all of the "newness" in my life, I was thrust into a mandate that my heart was not prepared for! My amazing colleague, my officemate, and my friend was gone. While I had dealt with and counseled so many on grief, this shook me at my

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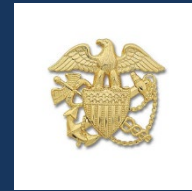


core. I admit that I selfishly wanted to escape that pain that I was feeling. I wanted things to be as they were. I prayed consistently to simply “wake up” from the nightmare that life had thrown me in! I found myself experiencing each stage of grief almost at the same time!

It had been engraved in me over the past six months that the mission must go on, so I put my uniform on and traveled back to work to support the mission. I silently fought through my pain as I made myself available to other teammates while being sure not to allude to anyone that I was struggling emotionally. I felt so incredibly alone. Without notice, all of the sacrifices that I had made came into question. I recall one day sitting in the office that I was to share w/ RN Skelley and found that I was no longer able to command my tears to remain in place. I was breaking and I was so fearful of someone noticing. With my back turned to the door, I was overwhelmed with emotions when someone touched my shoulder. I looked up to find a flood of Uniform Officers in Navy Blue and Beige Uniforms. In that moment, it didn’t seem to matter the ranking or the discipline. There was Commissioned Officers that came from every location of the building to offer support to myself and my team. Emails and phone calls came flooding in which was immediately followed-up by LCDR Cannon and CAPT Harris and members of Corps Care. It became evident that as a Uniformed Officer, I am NEVER alone!



Despite the heartache, I know that I am exactly where I am supposed to be at this time in my life. While I am still learning to adjust to serving without my friend nearby, I wear my Uniform knowing, without any doubt, that I am now apart



of an internal USPHS family who will not only serve the masses by supporting the mission but will also take care of each other even in our darkest hour!

Thank you, Corps Family! ~



## Social Workers of the Year

By CDR Kymberly Spady-Grove,  
DHSc, LCSW, BCD  
District 8  
Regional Behavioral Health Provider  
USCG Base New Orleans Clinic

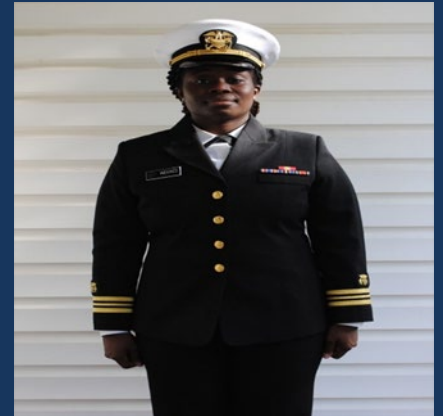
We would like to take this opportunity to honor and congratulate our own USPHS HSO Social Work Officers. Our 2021 Senior and Junior Social Workers of the Year are CDR Christine Nemeti and LCDR Jennifer Weekes.

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**2021 Senior Social Worker of the Year**  
CDR Christine Nemeti

**2021 Junior Social Worker of the Year**  
LCDR Jennifer Weekes



CDR Christine Nemeti -2021 Senior Social Worker of the Year -In recognition of her continuous demonstration of outstanding leadership and sustained high quality work performance as evident by significant career accomplishments. CDR Nemeti has served in various clinical social work positions as well as administrative positions within the Department of Defense and the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP). She has worked with severely mentally ill inmates, facilitating the inmate compassionate care and companion program. She has also directed a multi-disciplinary team of 30 health care professionals in providing healthcare to the inmates housed at MDC Brooklyn. While serving with the Department of Defense at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, CDR Nemeti was the Officer in Charge of the Fires & Sustainment behavioral health clinic and was the behavioral health lead for the Executive Leadership Readiness Program. CDR Nemeti is currently assigned to the Bureau of Prisons as the chief social worker, where she is responsible for the provision of social worker services to inmates across the entire Federal Bureau of Prisons.



LCDR Jennifer Weekes - 2021 Junior Social Worker of the Year - In recognition of her sustained high quality officership, professional work performance, and significant contributions and demonstration of courage, while serving on deployment. During a time of crisis, her dedication to the USPHS mission resulted in her providing lifesaving behavioral health care and support to a community in desperate need. LCDR Weekes currently serves as a Senior Public Health Analyst at the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Bureau of Primary Healthcare.



She is also a visiting provider at Fort Belvoir Community Hospital Adult Behavioral Health Department. LCDR Weekes is dually credentialed in Social Work and Public Health and is actively engaged in health promotion-health education initiatives through PACE.

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## SWPAG Recruitment & Retention Sub-Group

presents

## SWPAG Officer Career Paths within PHS and Helpful Hints

By

LT NaKeisha Williams LCSW-C BCD  
Mental Health Provider  
316th Medical Squadron  
Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling, D.C.

### Rank and Name

03 - REGENA HARDY

### Current Agency Employed

IHSC

### Current Duty Station

ELOY DETENTION CENTER

### Current Job Title

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SPECIALIST



### Brief Description of Current Job Duties

Mental Health Assessments/tx, Case coordination/management, monitoring high risk Detainees, independent behavioral health reviews, behavioral health consultation services, and health record reviews.

### 1. Three words to describe yourself

Trustworthy, Friendly, and Blessed

### 2. How long have you been a Social Worker?

Over 20 years

### 3. Do you have any other degrees besides your MSW?

Yes. I have a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and Mgt. and I am a current Doctoral Student in a DSW program.

### 4. When did you become a PHS Officer? (Can you include a description of your OBC experience?)

I became an Official PHS Officer on 5 March 2021. I was an active member of the OBC125 class!!! Our class was completed Virtually. I was able to establish what I believe to be lifelong friendships from my class!

### 5. What agencies, duty stations, and responsibilities have you been assigned to throughout your career?

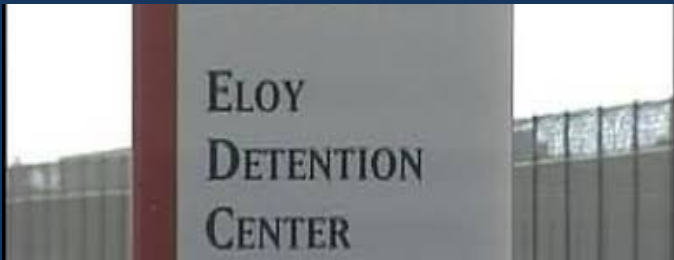
I have been assigned to IHSC only. My duties, however, have increased where I am now serving as the SWPAG Executive Secretary, a voting member of the SOAGDAG, Social Media/Marketing POC for the Surgeon General 5k event, POC for the LGBTQI Initiative at the Eloy Detention Center and the East Valley COA Secretary.

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**5. What deployment missions and roles have you fulfilled during your career?**

IHSC Eloy is a Mission Critical facility. I have been unable to deploy, at this time.



**6. Can you provide some recommendations for Junior Officers regarding graduate degrees, career progression and standing out for promotions?**

Seek out opportunities that pushes you out of your comfort zone. Don't be afraid to try something new. At the core of PHS is "Service". Develop and/or Maintain a servant heart. Serve with gratitude and respect for all people. Know that the work provided must be bigger than ourselves. Seek out mentorship. Be open to learning & growing. Ask questions. Show up early, stay late and be willing to show up on weekends.



**7. College degree(s) & certification(s) outside of Social Work.**

Trine (Tri-State) University: Bachelor of Science Business Admin/Mg  
Federal Acquisition Certification for Contracting Officer's Representatives - FAC-

COR; Certified Correctional Health Professional (CCHP); Six Sigma Green Belt; Six Sigma Black Belt; Board Certified Diplomate (BCD) in Clinical Social Work; Certified Advanced Social Work Case Manager (C-ASWCM)

**8. If you have another degree(s) or certification(s), why did you choose that one specifically?**

Having a business degree afforded me the opportunity to grow in the knowledge of multiple business disciplines, management and marketing skills. Having a degree in Social Work, however, afforded me the opportunity to be able to serve others on a variety of platforms. Serving as a Social Worker fulfills my purpose in life. It opened the door for me to do exactly what I was created to do in this world.



**U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement**

**9. Do you feel it has helped you in your career progression? Please explain.**

Dr. Myles Munroe coined a statement that helps express my core beliefs regarding my "career". He said, "the greatest tragedy in life is not death, but the greatest tragedy in life is a life without a purpose". As long as I continue to remain in purpose, I am confident that my career will continue to progress!





## Chair's Last Call

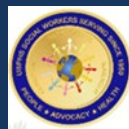


Robert E. Van Meir, LCSW, BCD,  
CCHP-MH, CCTP  
Supervisory, BH Provider  
ICE Health Services Corps (IHSC)  
Eloy Detention Center



SWPAG,

It is an honor and a privilege to serve as the SWPAG Chair for 2022. I have worked closely with several of the past Chairs, and I am aware of all the great work that they accomplished. I want to personally thank Captain Howard who in 2014 was the Chair of the Recruitment and Retention Committee. She worked with me to understand the role of the SWPAG and to mentor me in officership and was the one that encouraged me to run for the Chair last year. I also want to thank CDR Felder who helped me prepare for this new and exciting role.



The National Association of Social Workers theme for 2022 is “The time is Right for Social Work”. There are nearly 720,000 social workers in our nation. That number is expected to grow by 12 percent by the end of the decade, making social work one of the fastest growing professions in the nation, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. As America’s health responders the nation needs us more than ever. But we need to be there for each other as well.



To say that the last two years have been challenging is an understatement. The up tempo with deployments, dealing with COVID-19, and the promotion rates have had a major impact on a lot of our officers. As social workers we are trained to care for others however our self-care skills can sometimes be lacking.



The focus of the SWPAG this year will be on providing social worker officers with useful tools to help with promotions, self-care, and to increase officers’ involvement with the SWPAG. Each monthly SWPAG meeting will include a presentation on a relevant topic regarded to the concerns of our members. In January we presented on Promotion Anxiety and ways to manage and understand it. We have several exciting presentations upcoming

Chair's Last Call, continues pg. 14



including: Publishing in our Newsletter, Sister Service Promotions, and Developing Family Plans. We have so many talented individuals in our PAG, and we want to give them the opportunity to shine.



We have initiated a social worker-to-social worker outreach program which will begin in March. This program will see dedicated officers calling each USPHS Social Worker to provide support and to listen to your concerns. Please ask questions and we will attempt to answer them in each monthly meeting.



I encourage each officer to become an active participant in the SWPAG this year. We are hoping to showcase officers on the front lines and develop a greater sense of community. You are not alone. Again, it is an honor to serve as the Chair of the SWPAG for 2022.

Together we can accomplish so much.

*Semper Servientes ~*