

CDR Paul DeWitt, OD, FAAO, CPH is nominated for the Edward Hamilton Award 2021. CDR DeWitt exemplifies the merits of the Hamilton Award; insight, integrity, dedicated leadership and persistent hard work. He began his career as a resident in hospital based optometry, an elective post-graduate year, developing his clinical skills as a specialist in ocular disease and hospital based clinical practice.

CDR DeWitt found his calling enlisting in the USPHS in 2003, beginning his prestigious career in public health service. As a young Lieutenant he accepted a supervisory position, 0-5 billet, overseeing the programs administration and providing eye care services to 8,000 residents at Tohatchi Health Center (THC). His accomplishments include implementation of the electronic health record (EHR), one of the first eye clinics to do so in the Navajo Area region; developed a training tool used by 8 service units aiding their transition to EHR; increased patient encounters by 106% and collections by 182%; developed and managed a specialty contact lens clinic available to 210,000 Native American patients needing medically necessary contact lenses; mentored over 40 optometry students in their clinical rotations; provided education about eye conditions at outlying clinics and to residents in remote locations.

His collateral duties were many, he was appointed as the Diabetes Program Coordinator for the Gallup Service Unit and Performance Improvement Director, Infection control officer and acting Health System Administrator for the Tohatchi Health Center. Being an appointee reflects the confidence and respect held by the executive and medical teams, in his skills both as an administrator and clinician. He has continued to excel as a program manager throughout his career.

As a Lieutenant Commander (0-4) he relocated to Kayenta, AZ and served as the Service Unit Chief of Optometry with an agency position title of Clinical Optometrist, Senior Supervisor (0-6). He was the administrator of an eye care program serving a user population of 20,000. This was an isolated hardship, mission critical location in a remote and sparsely populated region of the Navajo Nation. He was promoted to Commander early in his tenure at Kayenta Health Center (KHC).

CDR DeWitt continued to excel, staying true to the hospital mission statement he expanded services establishing audiology, physical therapy and podiatry programs, increased the number of eye care visits between 2015 and 2019 by 40% and surpassed the federally mandated national goal for diabetic eye care screenings by over 10% in 2019. He recruited three optometrists, expanding access to care to residents desperately in need of eye care services. Recruiting staff to work in a remote location and within an impoverished community is challenging to say the least. His success speaks to his solid reputation as a public health officer and optometrist. Lastly, he was responsible for re-writing the Medical Staff Bylaws ensuring compliance with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services.

While serving at KHC he was promoted to the position of Director of the Division of Clinical Services, which he held for nine months. It is rare for an optometrist to serve as a clinical director of medical services at a health care facility and is an achievement that places him in an elite group. His integrity, leadership and persistent hard work was recognized and rewarded. He represented the USPHS as a capable leader. He successfully led the Ambulatory Care Services and Laboratory through the Joint Commission Survey in 2019 and implemented an Occupational Therapy Program never available in the history of the service unit.

CDR DeWitt accepted the position as Deputy Chief of Optometry at Four Corners Regional Health Care Facility in Red Mesa AZ as an advanced clinical optometrist and is considered an expert in his field. His tour of duty began on 12/1/2019. The facility is categorized as an isolated hardship, mission critical location and is part of the Shiprock Service Unit with a user population of nearly 52,000.

On 3/1/2020 CDR DeWitt began an official TDY assignment with the Incident Command Staff Operations Section for the FCRHC COVID-19 response. In this capacity, he has improved the recording and reporting process for community mass COVID-19 testing events resulting in over 1000 tests performed. He has compiled and organized the data of over 1100 employees in Shiprock Service Unit, maximizing the utilization of staff resources as the response to COVID-19 changes. He has developed a stratified COVID-19 Exposure Risk of 151 FCRHC employees based upon CDC and Agency guidance in anticipation of vaccine distribution and administration.

He received training and completed competencies to administer COVID-19 vaccine and manage FCRHC vaccine prime and booster list consisting of over 1350 patients (to date).

This year, the Armed Forces Optometric Society (AFOS) selected CDR DeWitt as the United States Public Health Service Senior Optometrist of the Year. Notably this is the second time AFOS recognized CDR DeWitt's significant contributions with this prestigious award.

Throughout his career he has served as an adjunct faculty member at Marshall B. Ketchum University in Fullerton, CA mentoring students and residents in medical optometry. CDR DeWitt has obtained and maintains a Certification in Public Health (2015) through the National Board of Public Health Examiners, Certification in Medical Optometry (2013) through the American Board of Medical Optometry and a Fellowship in the American Academy of Optometry (2014).

He has been a Tier 3 Member on the RedDog Response team since 2006, served as an officer liaison from 2018-2019 and color guard captain in 2016. He has voluntarily served as a team leader on the Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity (VOSH) for nineteen years, a non-profit organization operated purely by eye care professionals who share a passion for bringing vision care to every person domestically and in the developing world. He participates in a two week VOSH mission annually.

He served on a USPHS Humanitarian Civic Assistance Mission to Guatemala and El Salvador as the clinical team leader in 2008. He received five commendation medals, two achievement medals and four awards as an officer in the USPHS.

Mission:

CDR DeWitt has sustained a high quality work performance throughout the course of his career spanning 18 years. He has accepted and excelled in a leadership role for 17 years and has served as a mentor to students, residents and fellow officers. He accepted the position of Clinical Director at KHC successfully leading the entire medical staff through the Joint Commission Survey in 2019, he expanded services in areas that were not available to patients in the past and surpassed the federally mandated requirement for diabetic eye screenings. He accomplished greater access to eye care within the community he served by recruiting qualified optometrists in hard to fill positions. He has represented the USPHS with pride and is regarded as an expert in his field.

I support the nomination of CDR Paul DeWitt, OD, FAAO, CPH for the Edward Hamilton Award in recognition of his sustained high quality work over a career of 18 years and particularly for his

leadership at Kayenta Health Center, as the Clinical Director, a position outside of his chosen profession, beyond his grade and rank and critical to maintaining clinical care and medical staff credentialing at the facility. Lastly, for his role on the Incident Command Team at Four Corners Regional Health Center in the areas of risk management, as statistician and in vaccine administration in one of the hardest hit communities in the nation, the Native American population.