

OPAG Minutes 08/07/2019

MISSION: Represent and advocate for the professional discipline of optometry and its Commissioned Officers, civil servants, contract and tribal optometrists serving within the Public Health Service and affiliated services.

OPAG Voting Members

Present:

- CDR Christopher Cordes (Chair)
- LCDR Laura Alexander (Chair-Elect)
- LT Hanna Fylpaa (Executive Secretary)
- LCDR Jill Thompson
- LT Matthew Geiger
- CDR Sarah Stienbarger

Absent/Excused:

- CDR Gregory Smith
- CDR Patrick Britton
- LT Albert Licup

Liasons and Non-Voting Members

- LT Regina Sullivan
- CAPT Robert Chelberg
- LT Emily Mathiak

Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve minutes from 06/05/2019: LCDR Laura Alexander

Second: LCDR Jill Thompson

No objections. Minutes approved.

Subcommittee Chair Reports

1. **Administrative Management:** LCDR Laura Alexander
Nothing to report.
2. **Awards:** LCDR Laura Alexander
Following HSPAC guidelines and deadlines for awards so it will be several months before a call for nominations for awards through HSPAC/OPAG.
Armed Forces Optometric Society (AFOS) award nominations are due this Friday, August 9, 2019.
3. **Communications:** LCDR Jill Thompson
 - Communications Co-Chair: LT Emily Mathiak
Nothing to report.
4. **Data & Evaluations:** LT Albert Licup
Nothing to report.

5. Policy: LT Matthew Geiger

HSPAC SOP template has changed significantly from last year, a lot of things have been left out and also some new information. The new template lists specific duties for each subcommittee chair with detailed instructions on how to perform duties. LT Geiger will be reaching out to OPAG subcommittee chairs for additional information on roles.

6. Recruitment (Ad Hoc): CDR Sarah Stienbarger

PJ is no longer in the application process for the USPHS, but remains civil service IHS optometrist. IB is in the application process and has been scheduled a board interview date August 19, 2019. He is a former Commissioned Corps officer and may be interested in Fairbanks, AK and Warm Springs, OR. Felicia Bailey is taking over recruitment and application process at headquarters, so looking forward to improved communication with her.

7. Stakeholder & Community Engagement: CDR Patrick Britton

Nothing to report.

8. Technical Readiness: CAPT Robert Chelberg

Program for advanced readiness is moving forward, will determine how optometry is affected as the program unfolds. At the moment, remaining Basic Ready and volunteering for RAM missions highlights optometry's value to the Commissioned Corps. The ASH spent 2 days with optometry at the Minneapolis RAM mission.

9. Training, Education, and Mentorship: CDR Greg Smith

Nothing to report.

Stakeholder Engagement Reports

• **Chief Clinical Consultant:** CAPT Dawn Clary

Not present.

• **CDC Liaison:** LT Regina Sullivan

- Discussing CDC partners related to vision.
- National Optometric Association (NOA) conference was in July 2019. NOA is a major supporter of Healthy People 2020 with the objective to promote eye and general healthcare among minority groups. NOA has selected glaucoma, diabetes, and hypertension as their "Three Silent Killers" campaign and hope to increase the number of adults that have annual eye exams, reduce visual impairment due to these 3 conditions, and increase the number of adults with diabetes that receive annual dilated eye exams.
- National Center for Children's Vision and Eye Health (NCCVEH), which is part of Prevent Blindness. Federally funded by HRSA's maternal and child health bureau, under grant 87MMC. A technical assistance center that helps public health, education, early childhood and other sectors improve the systems that address children's vision. They request from optometrists: deliver a presentation to caregivers about common eye conditions and what happens during an eye exam, host a field trip to see an optometry office and equipment to reduce fear of eye exams, offer vision screenings and exams at early childhood facilities and schools, inform early childhood facilities and schools what insurances are accepted, send text message reminders, offer to serve as a vision consultant

to your local head start, work with NOA and NCCVEH as part of Prevent Blindness on their social media campaign.

- This information, as well as a brochure on Zika in the eyes, will be provided via email to OPAG members following today's meeting.
- National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine call for consensus and uniformity in clinical practice guidelines regarding vision screenings. Attempt to come up with evidence based standard guideline for anyone performing vision screenings.
- CDC Vision Health Initiative has a grant that is building state capacity. Working with National Association of Chronic Disease directors to support state departments to engage in activities that improve vision and eye health. Currently they are partnered with Alabama, Nebraska, and Ohio. The following link provides additional information:
<https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/programs/state-capacity.html>

Discussion Topics/ Q&A

• Promotion Review

- 3 of 4 LCDR and 1 of 8 CAPT
- Disappointing results, unsure what setbacks were, there are increased "automatic take outs" regarding readiness and other components.
- Congratulations to those promoted. For those not promoted, continue to work and reach out to CAPT Dawn Clary and CAPT Barbara Cohn, as well as CDR Cordes and CDR Smith.

• AFOS – LCDR Laura Alexander

- Difficulty with tribal ODs getting applications approved under AFOS instead of state affiliates. Recently 1 application was approved and 1 was rejected. AFOS continues to work on this.
- Technology-based Eye Care Services (TECS) Program being pushed by OMDs within the VA. AOA is concerned that this program is falling short of standard of care and providing veterans with substandard eye care, such as providing glasses prescriptions from an auto-refraction. Some major questions that arise are where patients go for follow-up care, who refers and who they are referred to. The VA telehealth council that is in charge of setting the policy signed off that TECS was a benefit to veterans but not everyone agrees. This could potentially eliminate ODs from the VA system and replace them with this TECs program. The AOA is getting actively involved and contacting legislators. AFOS is assisting in mediating the AOA and VA regarding the TECs program.
- ODs and other providers, such as plastic surgeons, within Wichita, Kansas VA had scope of practice limited by an administrative action by the Chief of Staff, who happens to be an OMD. All the doctors at the time had appealed the action but it was still upheld for unknown reasons. The AOA is actively pushing legislature there as well.
- Within the DOD there is a state of flux with potential reduction of force among all 3 branches, Army, Navy, and Air Force. They have all been asked to cut billets, which they do, but then in reality they end up returning and adding billets back later. There is an idea among current administration to group all healthcare into one unit as a whole and remove the service-specifics.
- Next AFOS meeting is in October in Orlando, Florida, the few days prior to American Academy of Optometry annual meeting.

• AMSUS – CDR Stienbarger

- 2019 AMSUS Annual meeting December 2-6 in Washington DC. Registration is open. Hotel reservations are open. Clinical conference that is all inclusive for all federal healthcare-related professions, not just Commissioned Corps. Applications for poster abstracts for the meeting are still being accepted until end of August. Official PHS poster and presentation logos are available for this. USPHS Day is Friday, December 6 and will discuss modernization and leadership updates, will

be attended by ASH ADM Brett Giroir and Surgeon General VADM Jerome Adams. AMSUS awards include group and individual awards, nominator process is standardized and well laid out, however nomination deadline has passed.

- **OPAG Feature in HSPAC** – thank you for photos and submissions.
- **Call to Active Duty**
 - No new optometrists called to active duty. Working below private sector pay scale and difficulty with promotions are deterrents to applying to the Corps.
- **IP/RB/BP/BCIP:**
 - CDR Cordes was up for HPSP this month, received an email that processing is still behind so normal pay was received. This is common among multiple officers.
 - LT Mathiak received new HPSP correctly one month after it was supposed to go into effect.
 - LT Geiger was given the option to keep January 1 as HPSP effective date or to coordinate with RCD.
- **Deployment Opportunities/Importance**
 - CDR Cordes plans to deploy on the USNS Comfort October 11 – November 18.
 - CDR Smith was approved to deploy, however his area CEO revoked his approval to deploy.
 - RAM Missions:
 - Oklahoma: LCDR Alexander, LT Mathiak, and LT Geiger deployed. LT Geiger led the team. 5 optometry students participated. The mission went smoothly.
 - Baltimore: September 2019. CAPT Chelberg stresses the importance of having a presence at this RAM mission. 4-6 optometrists would be ideal.
 - Challenges and concerns with deployments:
 - Currently there are 52 Commissioned Corps optometrists, 22 below O6 and 30 CAPTs. 48 are in clinical roles. Deployments often request 10-15 optometrists for missions. New Commissioned Corps applicants are being denied. CDR Cordes is receiving emails requesting more optometrists to deploy but this is difficult given current standings and roles.
 - Short notice for planned deployment events is not conducive to providers in clinical roles with patient schedules booked out 6+ weeks in advance.
 - Remote locations make travel to deployments difficult and time consuming. Many duty stations are hours away from the nearest airport or require multiple connections.
 - Scheduled village travel in Alaska is booked 3-6 months in advance and conflicts with deployment events.
 - Supervisory approval is often denied due to short staffing at duty stations. Often optometrists are solo providers so any form of deployment would require shutting down the clinic at the assigned duty station to provide care elsewhere.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:51am by CDR Cordes.

Upcoming OPAG meetings:

02-October-2019

All meetings are:

08:00 Alaska
09:00 Pacific
10:00 Mountain
11:00 Central
12:00 Eastern