



# USPHS

## Social Work Professional Advisory Group Newsletter

### Chair's Corner



Greetings SWPAG Leaders,

As we end this year, I would like to say thank you for allowing me to serve you as your 2019 Social Work Professional Advisory Group (SWPAG) Chair. It has been a great pleasure working with you and achieving many of the goals that I wanted to accomplish while in

this role. "Rising to the Top" was my theme this year and I believe that we have made great strides this year to rise to the top and are continuing to do so with all our hard work in the SWPAG, our various assigned job roles, and communities. We are without a doubt an awesome profession and I am so proud to be a part of it.

I am also very excited that CDR Booker will be assuming the role as your new Chair for 2020. I have no doubt that she will do an excellent job. Additionally, I have graciously accepted the role as her new Senior Advisor. I look forward to continuing to work with her and other officers in this new role. Again, congratulations to new selectees, SWPAG Chair-Elect CDR Stephanie Felder, Executive Secretary, LT Janelle Phillip, and all our three-year voting members. I wish all these officers the very best and am here to support and provide any guidance that is needed to help assure their success.

A special thanks to all the SWPAG Executive members (Senior Advisor, Chair-Elect and Executive Secretary), subgroup chairs, co-chairs, subgroup members, and volunteers for all that you do and your roles in helping to accomplish the goals of the SWPAG this year. Please know that none of these goals could have been accomplished without you and thank you so much for your support, dedication, and contributions.

### SWPAG Executive Committee

**Chair:** CDR Deloris Caldwell

**Chair-Elect:** CDR Tricia Booker

**Exec. Sec.:** LT Dierdra Oretade-Branch

**Senior Advisor:** CDR Indira Harris

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**Please review our list of accomplishments for this year (2019).**

- First Flagship collaboration with Black Commissioned Officer Association on Suicide Prevention in the black community, which will be ongoing
- First Self-Care initiative, which 6 training sessions were offered to all social workers on how to implement self-care to prevent burn out and promote overall over all well-being and to prevent burn out.
- A promotion forum has been offered and implemented by the SWPAG chair in collaboration with the training, education, mentoring Subgroup Co-Chair, which newly promoted officers will provide meaningful and helpful tips about promotion.
- Successfully filled 8 voting membership positions including the SWPAG Chair-elect and SWPAG executive secretary position.
- Ongoing collaboration with APAOC healthy mind initiative as it relates attendance and participation of various outreach activities.
- Continued successful collaboration with George Mason University for Social Work Month, which commissioned corps SWPAG officers actively participate in the planning and implementation of the yearly conference.
- Collaborated and assisted the HSPAC Community Wellness Subcommittee on the inaugural wellness room at the 2019 Commissioned Officer Association conference.

**SWPAG Communication Committee Accomplishments**

**Chair: CAPT Julie Niven**

**Co-Chair: LCDR Lorener Brayboy**

- Four newsletters published over the last year (quarterly).
- A new section was added to the newsletter to provide an additional avenue in which SWPAG members could submit items of interest to the listserv.

**SWPAG Awards Committee Accomplishments**

**Chair: CDR Kymberly Spady-Grove**

**Co-Chair: CDR Preston Shumaker**

The Award Subcommittee received a total of 5 awards for the SWOTY.

- One nomination was received for the SR SWOTY
- Four nominations were received for the JR SWOTY

SWPAG Junior and Senior Social Worker of the Year (SWOTY) recipients received the awards at the 2019 COA Symposium.

Senior Social Worker of the Year: **CDR Daniel Stanley**

Junior Social Worker of the Year: **LCDR Dustin Bergerson**



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- Letter of Appreciation for CAPT Ilze Ruditis on February 14, 2019 for mentorship of social workers and peers.
- Letter of Appreciations for Washington, DC Veteran Affairs Medical Center's Baby Shower 2nd Annual Baby Shower for female Veterans held on May 18, 2019.
- Letter of Appreciations for SWPAG Continuing Education programs Lead by LCDRs Richards and Worrell-Oriola.
- New SWPAG Awards Subcommittee Members: CDRs Teresa Baptiste, Tracey Jackson-Weaver, Christine Nemeti, Robert Garcia, and LT Marie P. Cetoute

### **Stakeholders and Community Engagement Committee Accomplishments/Activities**

**Chair: LT Jamillah Bynum**

**Co-Chair: CDR Sonsy Fermin**

- Volunteered at the DC VA Homeless Veterans Stand Down on 1/26/19
- Stakeholders and Community Engagement Committee hosted a Meet-n-Greet on 3/8/19 at Pin-stripes Bowling Alley in North Bethesda. 10 PHS social workers were in attendance.
- Hosted Social Work Month activities at NIH, SAMHSA, and Ft. Belvoir.
- Hosted Social Work Social at Symposium in Minneapolis, MN on 5/8/19.
- Collected and donated baby centric items to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual 2019 DC VA Baby Shower Event on 5/18/19
- Participated in the DC COA Maternal and Child Health Fair, 10/12/2019. Two PHS social workers manned a Behavioral Health Table.

### **SWPAG Training, Education, Mentorship**

**Chair: LCDR Monique Richards**

**Co-Chair: LCDR Monique Worrell; CDR Kimberly Jones**

- Mentoring subgroup created a 3-year strategic plan geared to identify and operationalize enhanced support for SWPAG Officers
- Mentoring Subgroup successfully accomplished the Officer Needs Assessment Survey
- From the survey, mentoring identified support areas to be addressed in next operation year
- Mentoring subgroup streamlined members in accordance with HSPAC and identified Action Officers
- Mentoring subgroup published a Mentoring Readiness article in SWPAG Newsletter
- Implemented the Promoted Officer Forum to assist social workers with preparation for promotion



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### **SWPAG Technical Readiness Accomplishments**

**Chair: CDR Tricia Booker**

**Co-Chair: CDR Kari Harris**

- Constructed and created SWPAG Deployment Clinical Competencies and Roles for HSPAC
- Effectively identified crucial roles and skills need by SPWAG officers while on deployment
- Uncovered various web base training to support these role and competencies
- Over saw SWAPG Level Advanced Readiness Program and enrollees
- Increased SWPAG involvement from 4 to 9 officers
- Completed first subgroup SOP outlining the duties/responsibilities of all subgroup members in line with HSPAC SOP
- Submitted quarterly Readiness Tip to SWPAG Newsletter

### **SWPAG Data and Evaluation**

**Chair: CDR Allah-Fard Sharrieff**

**Co-Chair: CDR Alysa Ward (Jackson)**

- Constructed and deployed SWPAG Deployment Readiness survey that was completed by 28% (51 respondents) of the PHS social workers.
- Effectively identified clinical skills, readiness level and language capabilities
- Uncovered access to care issues for officers in need of mental health appointments upon redeployment
- Recommending further investigation and/or training (by SWPAG and/or REDdog
- Increased membership 63% with the induction of three new member; one of which filled the secretary role

### **SWPAG Policy Accomplishments**

**Chair: CAPT William Bolduc**

**Co-Chair: CAPT Karen Heard**

- Proposed and formulated a social work internship pilot in one or more agencies
- Revised Social Work White Paper
- Collaborated with Corps Care Coordinator in providing recommendations for resiliency and encouraging Officers to seek assessment and treatment as needed



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- Worked collaboratively with the HSPAC Policy Subcommittee on initiatives affecting HSO Officers in the Corps
- Revised all SWPAG SOPs to ensure compliance with HSPAC Policy Subcommittee standards

### **SWPAG Administrative Management (includes Membership & Treasurer/Coin Sales)**

**Chair: CDR Dan Stanley**

**Co-Chair: CDR Cole Weeks**

- Completed re-design of the Official SWPAG Roster with new column categories added including the ability to add the specific Response Team assignments. A new "Statistics" tab with charts added showing officer percentages by Billet Type, Mentoring Program, Temporary Rank, Agency, as well as a chart showing the total SWPAG officer totals for the past 9 years.
- Completed first subgroup SOP outlining the duties/responsibilities of all subgroup members.
- Began utilizing the HSPAC monthly roster to identify and contact all new CAD social workers with formal introduction to SWPAG and invitation to join.
- Completed the "SWPAG T-Shirt Design Contest" fund raiser. The winning design was used, and 22 shirts were sold as part of the fund raiser.
- Sold 20 SWPAG Coins.

### **SWPAG Recruitment/Retention**

**Chair: LCDR Robert E. Van Meir**

**Co-Chair LCDR Tanya Barragan**

- Working with DoD for a 2nd virtual job fair for DoD vacancies.
- Completing the SWPAG Brochure.
- CDR Booker giving the SWPAG PowerPoint Presentation at North Carolina State University.
- Developing a 2nd Virtual Job fair for CAD/AD social workers regarding career opportunities in ICE Health Service Corps.

*Thank you all for a wonderful year and I wish you and your family a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.*

CDR Deloris Caldwell, SWPAG Chair



# **SWPAG CHAIR-ELECT, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY AND SUBGROUP CHAIRS FOR 2020**

## **SWPAG Chair-Elect**

CDR Stephanie Felder

## **SWPAG Executive Secretary**

LT Janelle Phillip

## **SWPAG Communications**

LCDR Lorener Brayboy

## **SWPAG Awards**

CDR Spady Grove

## **SWPAG Stakeholder and Community Engagement**

LCDR Monique Worrell

## **SWPAG Training, Education, and Mentoring**

LCDR Monique Richards

## **SWPAG Technical Readiness**

LT Desirrae Harris

## **SWPAG Data and Evaluation**

LCDR Allah-Fard Sharrieff

## **SWPAG Policy**

CDR Stephanie Felder

## **SWPAG Administrative Management**

CDR Cole Weeks

## **Ad-HOC SubGroup SWPAG Recruitment and Retention**

LCDR Robert VanMeir

*Congratulations to All!!*



## OTHER ARTICLES OF INTEREST

### **The Importance of Ongoing Self-Assessment**

By CAPT Julie A. Niven, IHSC, Jena, LA

Have you ever been to a doctor's appointment and found yourself feeling less than truly cared for or about, being asked questions without eye contact, and told rather than asked to complete tasks? If you're human, you have! We all have. What about when the roles are reversed? If you are a clinician, is "care" still first and foremost in the healthcare you provide to your patients?

At times throughout my 20+ years as a clinician, I've noticed care is not always apparent in the healthcare some providers provide to their patients. Why is this I wonder? Maybe the providers are having problems at home, are distracted or feeling burned out. Maybe the providers aren't putting the time they need into self-care. These are all plausible reasons and there are undoubtedly numerous more.

Just as a thorough assessment is crucial to direct the care of our patients, we as providers need to frequently self-assess to make sure we are directing our efforts in the most judicious way. Good patient care calls for ongoing assessment. The same applies to us as healthcare providers. Periodic self-assessment helps us to stay healthy and able to provide exceptional healthcare. It's a signal to our patients that we "practice what we preach."

Different agencies have different labels for people identified as "patients." Within IHSC, our patients are citizens of many different countries, male, female, transgender, old, young, and are a variety of skin colors. These individuals may be referred to as undocumented aliens and detainees, but we must never forget they our patients. Our patients are people first and as people they each deserve quality healthcare, we as healthcare providers have been trained to provide.

I challenge all clinicians/providers to take a moment to objectively evaluate not only your technical skills but your patient (people) skills and then use the information you find to guide your decision to seek out additional training if needed. Some ways to get additional support is to ask for guidance from a mentor, or even pursue other career opportunities as applicable.





# A United States Public Health Service Promotion Ceremony

By CDR Huu Nguyen and CDR Kari Harris, BOP, Victorville, California

On August 11, 2019, a promotion ceremony was conducted for CDR Kari Harris, social worker on board the USS Iowa in San Pedro, California.

After the presentation of the Colors by the US Navy JROTC Color Guard of John F. Kennedy High School from San Fernando, California, Mr. Walter Schuman performed the National Anthem on violin. CAPT Jeffrey Buckser (Health Services Officer) gave the opening remarks and welcomed guests, family members and friends to the ceremony. CAPT David Lau was the key note speaker at the event. His remarks focused on accomplishments of CDR Harris. CDR Harris started her PHS career at Dover Air Force Base in Dover, Delaware. She continued her career at Indian Health Services in Sacaton, Arizona and is currently working with the Federal Bureau of Prisons in Victorville.



CAPT Lau administered of the Oath of Office to CDR Harris. Family members performed changing of the boards on CDR Harris's uniform. CDR Harris led us in singing the PHS March. CAPT Lau provided closing remarks.







*Looks like it was a great day!*





## THE CLINICIAN'S TOOLBOX

### **Stress Resilience**

By CDR Kimberley Jones, DoD, Fort Riley, KS

*The emotional walls we build to protect us can block our view.*

Stress resilience is defined as the ability to adapt and recover from stressors. Initial responses to distress can include unhelpful coping mechanisms such as: avoidance, substance use, anger outbursts, and projection. Repeated use of these coping mechanisms lead to patterns uncondusive to resiliency. Examples of healthy coping skills include: help seeking, leaning on a support system, physical activity, problem solving, and engaging in enjoyable activities.

Many people find themselves experiencing emotional pain, stress, sadness, and negative life events. Despite negative challenges, many find optimal level of functioning in occupational, educational, and social pursuits. Developing stress resilience is a personal journey; however, people who are stress resilient share common attributes; like bamboo, resilient people can bend without breaking.

Of the ten habits of highly resilient people, the top four include:

- Boundary mindfulness. Resilient people understand the distinction between who they are at the core despite being affected by temporary suffering.
- Keeping good company. Resilient people seek out and surround themselves with resilient people.
- Self-awareness. Resilient people are aware when they are outside their “normal” and ask for help when they need it.
- Practicing acceptance. Resilient people understand that stress and emotional pain are a part of living and will ebb and flow. Accepting is not letting the stress take over, but leaning in to the experience with a wide range of emotions and trusting we will bounce back.

(Stress Resilience continued on the next page)



When experiencing stress the key is to **BRIDGE** flexibility and balance by:

**B**alancing negative energy with positive energy to boost your emotional tank.

**R**esisting the urge to isolate or avoid and instead using the stress response to foster problem solving.

**I**dentifying your support system and utilizing this resource to help create a bridge over troubled times.

**D**eciding you will take control of your stress and NOT allow your stress to control you.

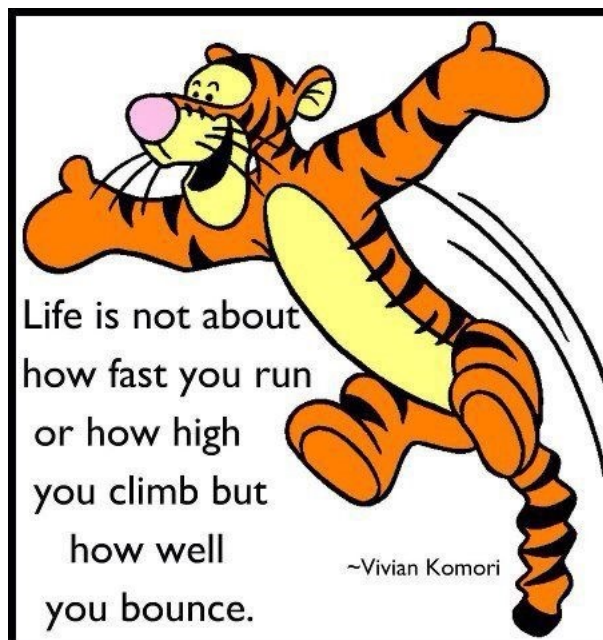
**G**iving yourself the directive to take responsibility for your mood.

**E**ngaging in enjoyable activities which will serve as positive as positive fuel when stressed. Healthy distractions temporarily allow positive surges in our resilience levels.

Stress resilience takes intentional effort, but with determination, support, and the development of helpful habits you can take control of stressors and take control of your life circumstances. It is not so much what happens to you, but how you manage what happens to you.

**Reference:**

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/design-your-path/201812/the-new-10-traits-emotionally-resilient-people>



## CONTINUING EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Would you like to become certified in Brain Story Science? The **Alberta Family Wellness Initiative** offers a 30 hour/19 self-paced module FREE training. In a nutshell, the initiative believes early life experiences change how brains get built which affects physical and mental health across the lifespan. Knowing this [they ask], how can we help families build strong brains and decrease risk for addiction and other negative health outcomes? Answer: By working together across disciplines, we can find new ways to help science have an impact on family and individual health. Check out the training and information about the initiative at:

<https://www.albertafamilywellness.org/>

### READINESS TIP

*Brought to you by the SWPAG-Readiness Subcommittee*



Greetings fellow Social Workers!



Just like life, our PHS Corps is always changing. Likewise we need to be ready to adapt and keep pace. If you are a tech junkie-your Garmin or FitBit is your personal barometer. These are helpful tools to keep up with your fitness goals, such as you Annual Physical Fitness test. To ensure compliance with this, as an officer, the RedDOG Self-Service Tab and the Officer Secure Area can be used to monitor your readiness. Make sure you are checking your Personal Dashboard which provides you a good overview of your Officer Readiness.

Fortunately, these IT and Website changes give us a chance to monitor and see if you are on target with all officer requirements. Readiness tip this quarter is a reminder that you can see your predicted 'Readiness Status' in the Officer Secure Area BEFORE your status of "NOT BASIC READY" becomes etched in the official RedDOG (aka... Readiness and Deployment Branch) files. This is important as any "NOT BASIC READY" can rule you ineligible for promotion.

*Wishing all officers a wonderful holiday season!*

### USPHS MERCHANDISE

To purchase APAOC Merchandise, please contact CDR Hai Lien Phung @ [vvt3@cdc.gov](mailto:vvt3@cdc.gov)



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



**For more information about our PAG,  
visit the SWPAG website at**

**<http://usphs-hso.org/?q=pags/swpag>**



### **SWPAG Meetings**

The *SWPAG General Body meeting* is held the third Thursday of  
each month at 1300 EST

The *SWPAG Executive Board meeting* is held every second Monday  
at 1200 EST.

***Watch for emails with agendas and call-in instruction.***





# Shout Out!



**Happy Holidays to Everyone!**



# Support Your SWPAG!

## MESSAGE FROM YOUR COMMUNICATIONS CHAIR



Another year is in the rearview mirror! Am I the only one saying, “Wow, where did the time go?” I remember when I was 20, I had a friend who was 82. I commented to her that time sure goes by quickly and she said to me that it just keeps going by faster and faster the older you get. I believe I remember this because I have found it to be true. So, maybe we should all take a moment in the new year and ask ourselves if we are on the right path for ourselves, our family, and our God. Another quote I like is from the graphic artist, Mary Engelbreit. She said, “Time Flies Whether We Are Having Fun or Not.” No, the object of life is not just to have fun of course, but if we are never having any or feel short most of the time, maybe we need to rethink our daily activities and goals for the future. Just my end of year thoughts.

*Respectfully,  
CAPT Julie Niven*

## Please submit articles for future publication in the SWPAG Newsletter to:

LCDR Lorener Brayboy, Chair, SWPAG Communications Subgroup, [LBrayboy@hrsa.gov](mailto:LBrayboy@hrsa.gov)

## Upcoming Issue Information:

**TBA**

