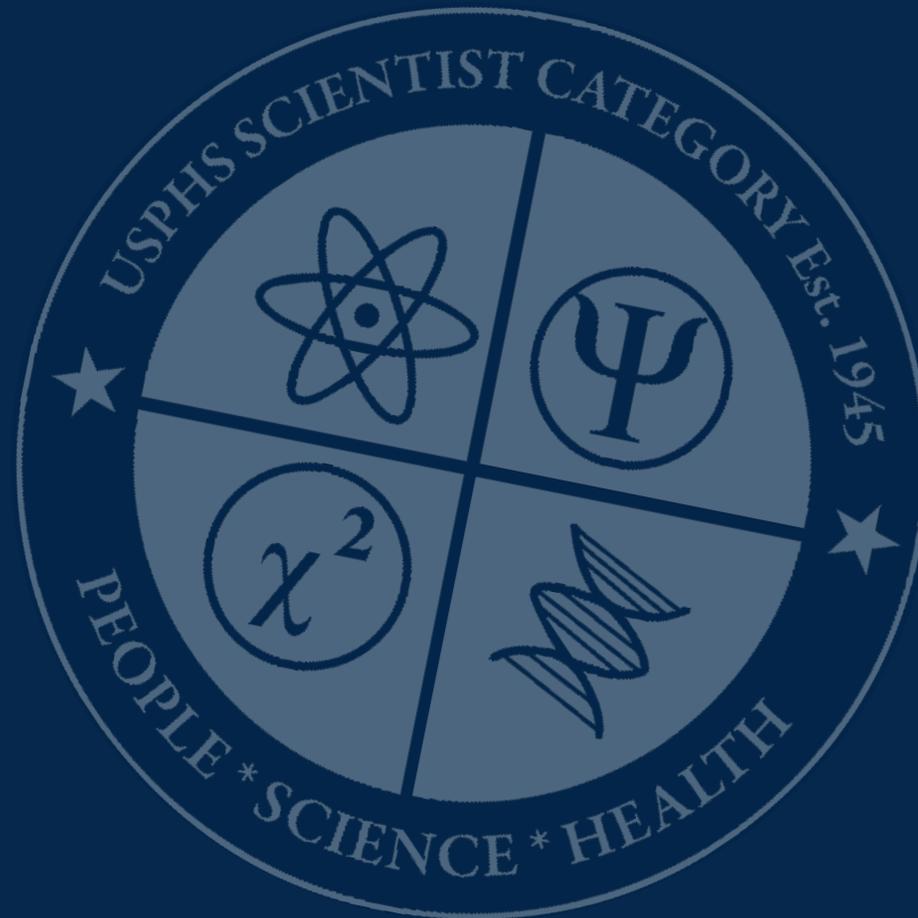


# *The Scientist Officer*



# Contents

<b>Page</b>	<b>Title</b>
<b>3</b>	<i>A Tribute to PHS Parents</i>
<b>4</b>	<i>Congratulations to SciPAC Award Winners</i>
<b>8</b>	<i>A SciPAC Officer Involvement in Prevention through Active Community Engagement (PACE)</i>
<b>9</b>	<i>Science Highlight: Trends in COVID-19 Incidence after Implementation of Mitigation Measures—Arizona</i>
<b>10</b>	<i>Scientist Officers Addressing Addiction in Washington, D.C. during National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week</i>
<b>11</b>	<i>Applications of Strategic Science: The CDC COVID-19 Science Agenda &amp; Beyond</i>
<b>12</b>	<i>SciPAC Fist Bump—LCDR Colleen Scott &amp; LT Marisa Hast</i>
<b>13</b>	<i>SciPAC Fist Bump—LCDR Sharoda Dasgupta</i>
<b>14</b>	<i>Officer Spotlight—CDR Erin Sauber-Schatz</i>

*This newsletter is for informational purposes only and does not reflect official views of the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps or USPHS leadership.*

# A Tribute to PHS Parents

By LCDR Sharoda Dasgupta, LCDR Hilda Razzaghi, and LCDR Alaine Knipes

PHS Officers work to protect, promote, and advance the health and safety of Americans each and every day. When COVID-19 ravaged our nation in 2020, PHS Officers stepped up to the plate. According to the 2021 State of the Scientist (SoS) survey, 97% of Scientist Officers stationed at CDC participated in one or more PHS or agency deployments during 2020.

However, these are proving to be challenging, unprecedented times. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have all had to overcome numerous obstacles, particularly PHS Officers who are parents. Primary caregivers, including mothers, may experience even more challenges, as they often shoulder a higher burden of household responsibilities compared to their partners (1). Despite these challenges, there are countless PHS parents who have gone above and beyond their duties and responsibilities, and their work has had, and continues to have, tremendous impact on national public health priorities.

*PHS Officers who are parents—here's to you!* We commend the sacrifices you make every day to serve and protect. Thank you for all you do every single day, not just for our country, but for your own families, who you prioritize each and every day as you fulfill your mission as a PHS Officer.

Here are just a few profiles of PHS Scientist parents who have gone above and beyond over the last year.

*Note: These stories are from PHS Scientists stationed at CDC; perspectives from other agencies would be welcomed for publication in upcoming editions of the newsletter!*

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 4)

# A Tribute to PHS Parents

## LCDR Alaine Knipes

In early 2020, I was finally feeling as though I had attained a work/life balance as a new mom to my then 5-month-old son, Arsalan. The teachers at daycare were kind and welcoming, and I was easily navigating my new routine through traffic from home to daycare to the office and then back again. In early March, all of that changed when there was a COVID-19 case reported among the staff at daycare, and the program closed. Things changed for everyone – and we were all wondering for how long this would last.

Somehow, I managed to keep Arsalan at home, while teleworking, for the next 6 months! I still am not sure how I managed both. There were definitely days when I was grateful that he was not yet crawling, but then he started crawling, then walking, and it became more difficult to accomplish simple work tasks without constant interruption. Gotta love the little guy and his curiosity!

I was finally comfortable returning Arsalan to daycare in August and was grateful for all of the precautions the administration had in place. He was excited to be among friends, and I was relieved for him to have the additional stimulation.

At the end of August, I deployed for the first of my two CDC COVID-19 response roles in person at the CDC's Emergency Operations Center (EOC). As Special Assistant to the CDC COVID-19 Incident Manager, I was able to see the entire CDC response from a bird's-eye view. I quickly got up to speed on the activities across all the Task Forces, and I felt I was playing an important role in the coordination and communication at the highest levels of the response. I would resume the role again in January 2021, a crucial time in our country's response to COVID-19.



LCDR Knipes and her son Arsalan (age 1) take a break for a walk during her August–September 2020 deployment in Atlanta.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 5)

# A Tribute to PHS Parents

## LCDR Hilda Razzaghi

I have been continuously deployed to CDC's COVID-19 response since March 9, 2020—4 days before school closures in the Atlanta area. Similar to many Officers, I have contributed to different task forces and teams in the past year. A few highlights of my contributions include leading the first MMWR report on severe outcomes among patients with COVID-19 (2) and the development of content and FAQs for CDC's COVID-19 web page regarding people with disabilities in the early days of the response. I went on to lead another MMWR report that utilized national survey data to estimate the prevalence of underlying conditions at the county level in the United States to assist states with planning and resource utilization (3).

Similar to many of our Officers, my list of contributions can go on, but so can the list of my struggles! Many of these contributions and 11-12 hour days were accompanied by homeschooling my fifth grader and entertaining my 2-year-old, trying to figure out Google meets and Zoom meetings, and setting alarms for work and school meetings so that no one would miss any meetings. Weekends and weekdays blended together, and there were no set work hours anymore; somehow working until 1 or 2 a.m. became the norm and continues to be the norm some days! There were no playdates, no playgrounds, nothing to entertain the kids, and trampolines were sold out everywhere! The work had to continue, as did our lives at home. As if the challenges were not enough, I took on a new permanent position during the response and while deployed. My new position was to focus on vaccination coverage among adults, which now includes COVID-19 vaccination.

We have all struggled in many ways for the last year as parents, as dedicated Scientist Officers, as friends, and as family members. I was fortunate to have my parents spend time with my family and share our struggles, to cook for us, and to give our kids hugs when the days were hard, and I wasn't around to hug them. Nothing much has changed since then except that the kids have gone back to school on and off since last October and think that masks are part of daily

outfits, and they have had a few play dates with masks on and outside. The hardest part of the last year has been the guilty feeling of being absent while physically present! Cheers to all of us who have magically made it through the last year, worked long hours and days, and entertained and home schooled our children during all of it.



Maral (9) and Sevda (2) are pictured on their front porch shortly after schools closed in March 2020.



LCDR Hilda Razzaghi and her children Maral (10) and Sevda (3) in West Virginia during their first ever RV trip in September 2020.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 6)

# A Tribute to PHS Parents

## LCDR Sharoda Dasgupta

In Spring 2020, I had to pull my two rambunctious children—then ages 1 and 3—out of daycare, requiring me to juggle my household responsibilities and my day job to a degree that neither I, nor anyone else around me, had ever experienced.

Following my passion for public health response, however, I became heavily involved in the CDC COVID-19 response in 2020. During the last 14 months, I have served on four different task forces. The accomplishment I am most proud of during my work on the response is my work in leading a recent MMWR report, finding that counties with greater social vulnerability were more likely to become areas with rapidly increasing COVID-19 (4). Given that equity is a crosscutting consideration in vaccine access, the report was shared during an ACIP meeting (5), and, as recommended by both ACIP and NASEM (6), was used to help inform the U.S. COVID-19 vaccine allocation strategy.

Despite my contributions to the COVID-19 response, I consider my children to be my number one priority—ensuring not only that their physical needs are met, but also that they feel loved during these unprecedented times. Balancing work and childcare is never easy, under any circumstances. It is a struggle that is exceedingly magnified during stressful periods such as this one. But it is one I would not trade for anything. I may have a few more grey hairs and wrinkles than I did a year ago, and I am fairly certain I am covered in stickers, gifted to me by one or both of my toddlers. But, boy, am I glad to have their love. Just the same, I feel lucky to have the opportunity to respond to public health emergencies and make a difference in people's lives.

This struggle will continue and leaning on other PHS moms around me will continue to help. To all you PHS moms out there—we can do this. If you are struggling and need to talk, please know I am here. Others are here. We are part of a larger community of PHS moms that will continue to lean on each other and support each other through rough patches and celebrate our accolades.



LCDR Sharoda Dasgupta pictured with her husband and kids, Anahata (2) and Arjoon (4), during her second pandemic birthday celebration.



Close in age, Anahata and Arjoon have become each other's best companions during this time of social distancing.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 7)

# A Tribute to PHS Parents

**Acknowledgment:** We acknowledge LCDR Jennifer Beauregard for providing data from the 2021 SoS survey for this article.

## References

1. Gallup. Women Still Handle Main Household Tasks in the U.S. Available from: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/283979/women-handle-main-household-tasks.aspx>.
2. Severe Outcomes Among Patients with Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) — United States, February 12–March 16, 2020. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2020;69:343–346. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6912e2>.
3. Razzaghi H, Wang Y, Lu H, et al. Estimated County-Level Prevalence of Selected Underlying Medical Conditions Associated with Increased Risk for Severe COVID-19 Illness — United States, 2018. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2020;69:945–950. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6929a1>.
4. Dasgupta S, Bowen VB, Leidner A, et al. Association Between Social Vulnerability and a County’s Risk for Becoming a COVID-19 Hotspot — United States, June 1–July 25, 2020. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2020;69:1535–1541. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6942a3>.
5. Wallace M. Disparities in COVID-19 Incidence, Severity, and Outcomes. ACIP Meeting, September 2020. Available from: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/acip/meetings/downloads/slides-2020-09/COVID-05-Wallace-508.pdf>.
6. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine. A Framework for Equitable Allocation of Vaccine for the Novel Coronavirus. Available from: <https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/a-framework-for-equitable-allocation-of-vaccine-for-the-novel-coronavirus>.

# SciPAC Officer Involvement in Prevention through Active Community Engagement (PACE)

By CDR Erika Odom and LCDR Jonathan Leshin

Scientist Officers were founding members of Prevention through Active Community Engagement (PACE), a Office of the Surgeon General advisory group chartered in 2013. “PACE leverages the expertise of Commissioned Corps officers to provide education about the benefits of prevention in their local communities.” Scientist Officers continue to be at the helm, leading PACE efforts nationally and internationally, currently occupying 7 named role and leadership positions.

## PACE and Scientist Officers by the numbers:

- 2 of 3 founding members: CDR John Pesce, LCDR Jonathan Leshin
- 3 of 5 executive board members: CDR John Pesce, LCDR Jonathan Leshin, LCDR Shiny Mathew
- 2 of 15 executive committee members: LCDR Iman Martin, LCDR Tajah Blackburn
- 2 of 16 regional coordinators: CDR Mark Miller, CDR Tracy Powell
- PACE Awards recipients:
  - CDR Erika Odom, LCDR Rashid Njai (2019, Collaborative Community Service – Atlanta PACE Legacy Leadership Group)
  - LT Lacreisha Ejike-King, LCDR Nancy Tian, and LT Prince Awuah (2020, Collaborative Community Service – PACE Washington, DC)

**Notable Achievement:** Since 2013, the Atlanta team has championed PACE’s implementation in the local community. Officers have volunteered over 100 hours and received two Unit Commendation awards, bringing visibility of the USPHS and the agency to the Atlanta area. Scientist Officer, CDR Zewditu Demissie, is the

2020-2021 Atlanta PACE lead.

**Activity Highlight:** Scientist Officer, LCDR Jonathan Leshin supports Maryland Day – an annual public health education event where topics of healthy eating, exercise, and vaping have been shared with the community. The event has an attendance of over 500 people each year.

To learn more about PACE, please contact [CDR Erika Odom](mailto:iyo7@cdc.gov) at [iyo7@cdc.gov](mailto:iyo7@cdc.gov), [LCDR Jonathan Leshin](mailto:Jonathan.Leshin@fda.hhs.gov) at [Jonathan.Leshin@fda.hhs.gov](mailto:Jonathan.Leshin@fda.hhs.gov), or [LCDR Shiny Mathew](mailto:Shiny.Mathew@fda.hhs.gov) at [Shiny.Mathew@fda.hhs.gov](mailto:Shiny.Mathew@fda.hhs.gov)



# Science Highlight: Trends in COVID-19 incidence after implementation of mitigation measures — Arizona

By LCDR Francis Annor and LCDR Tia Rogers

As of June 14, 2021, over 33 million Americans have been diagnosed with COVID-19, with over 597,000 dying from the disease. Communities have sought to reduce transmission by implementing mitigation strategies such as wearing masks, social distancing, stay-at-home orders, and limiting large gatherings to name just a few. LCDR Shayne Gallaway and colleagues led a study to assess the effectiveness of these strategies in reducing community spread of COVID-19 in Arizona. His study found that these strategies indeed work, concluding that ‘widespread implementation and enforcement of sustained community mitigation measures informed by state and local officials’ continual data monitoring and collaboration can help prevent transmission of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, and decrease the numbers of COVID-19 cases.’ LCDR Gallaway’s study has been widely disseminated, used, and highlighted, including but not limited to:

- Referenced during public discussions amongst the President and President-elect staff of a coordinated national strategy for imposing mask mandates with governors and mayors to prevent the cumulative loss of more than half a million lives, including those with pre-existing comorbid and chronic conditions
- Cited by White House Coronavirus Task Force Members, United States Surgeon General, Assistant Secretary for Health, and directors of health agencies as the hallmark observation for prevention of disease spread and associated death from COVID-19
- Highlighted as a Sunday Spotlight by the United States Surgeon General and Assistant Secretary for Health
- Included in a briefing of senior leadership during a CDC COVID-19 Incident Management meeting
- Featured in over 200 news stories and repeatedly cited in mainstream news and social media as justification for sustained widespread mitigation measures
- Viewed more than 115,000 times.



LCDR Shayne Gallaway, Scientist Officer assigned to the Arizona Department of Public Health.

Gallaway MS, Rigler J, Robinson S, et al. Trends in COVID-19 Incidence After Implementation of Mitigation Measures — Arizona, January 22–August 7, 2020. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2020;69:1460–1463. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/>

# *Scientist Officers Addressing Addiction in Washington, D.C., during National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week*

By LT Lacreisha Ejike-King and LT Dianca Finch

As the nation is combating the COVID-19 pandemic, many cities are still grappling with addiction among its residents. Washington, D.C., is no exception. LT Lacreisha Ejike-King and LT Dianca Finch, members of the D.C. Metropolitan Area Surgeon General Education Team (SGET), were instrumental in educating Washingtonians about addiction during National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), “National Drug & Alcohol Facts Week is an annual, week-long, health observance that inspires dialogue about the science of drug use & addiction among youth” (1). This collaborative observance brings together stakeholders including scientists, educators, and community partners to promote prevention and awareness about substance misuse. National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week provided a perfect opportunity for USPHS officers to work with the local community to improve public health.

LT Ejike-King, as the Washington, D.C. Community Engagement Officer for the D.C. Metro SGET, developed and cultivated a relationship with the DC Prevention Center for Wards 5 and 6. The Prevention Center is an instrumental community stakeholder that objectively focuses local efforts to prevent drug use, particularly opioid misuse and vaping which are leading SGET education priorities. Although the COVID-19 pandemic derailed event plans in 2020, LT Ejike-King successfully re-engaged with the Prevention Center in early 2021 to plan a full week of events. The D.C. Metro SGET planned a daily presentation schedule covering topics related to the community opioid crisis, opioid overdose response training, and vaping. Additionally, the SGET was asked to deliver a presentation on COVID-19 because of its current impact on substance use and misuse in D.C. as well as potential impact on all activities that the Prevention Center currently conducts. These presentations were conducted from March 22–25, 2021.

LT Finch kicked off the week with a dynamic presentation about opioid crisis in the community. The presentation focused on: the risks associated with opioid use; understanding naloxone administration; substance abuse and addiction; opioid storage and disposal; and steps individuals can take to prevent opioid misuse and overdose in their community. Additionally, LT Finch was able to engage the virtual community audience with short videos and an interactive knowledge assessment regarding the opioid presentation. Overall, LT Finch’s presentation was met with rave reviews with the Prevention Center mentioning several times that the presentation set a fantastic tone for the rest of the week.

Through planning and implementing National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week activities with the D.C. Prevention Center, LT Ejike-King and LT Finch were able to join their professional passions, educational background, and SGET objectives. Their involvement in this annual observance provided an opportunity to provide vital health education in the nation’s capital regarding co-occurring issues that continue to threaten the health and well-being of the local community.

1. National Institute on Drug Abuse. Learn About National Drug & Alcohol Facts Week. Available from: <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/national-drug-alcohol-facts-week/learn-about-ndafw#topic-1>

# Applications of Strategic Science: The CDC COVID-19 Science Agenda and Beyond

By LCDR Teresa Wang

In 2020, CDC released a [Science Agenda for COVID-19](#) (1), which articulates key areas of scientific inquiry and opportunities to ultimately support the public health response to end the COVID-19 pandemic. As the evidence base continues to evolve, this *Science Agenda* has helped promote efforts to fill critical, time-sensitive scientific gaps and to inform evidence-based decision making. To help achieve the objectives outlined in *the Science Agenda for COVID-19*, LCDR Teresa Wang deployed to the CDC COVID-19 Emergency Response's Strategic Science Unit (SSU) during February–March 2021, collaborating to systematically identify *Priority Science Questions* that were relevant, actionable, near-term, and that reflected the evolving needs of the ongoing public health response. Moving forward, these *Priority Science Questions* will help guide prioritization of CDC's scientific research portfolio related to COVID-19.

On Friday, March 19, 2021, a new set of 19 [Priority Science Questions](#) (2) was released, which fall into six major topic areas:

- Variants
- Prevention Strategies and Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions
- Vaccines
- Testing
- Natural History, Reinfection, Health Impacts
- Transmission Risk, Dynamics

These new questions reflect the broad scope of CDC and other public health partners' scientific work related to COVID-19, including surveillance, research, implementation science, and evaluation. Notably, these questions also serve to support progress toward reducing COVID-19 disparities and achieving health equity, and they contain cross-cutting considerations for social, behavioral, and communication science.

To further disseminate the *Science Agenda* to external stakeholders, the State, Tribal, Local, and Territorial Support Task Force reached out to key public health partners, including the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, the National Association of County and City Health Officials, the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists, and the Association of Public Health Laboratories. Tailored communications were also sent to state epidemiologists, CDC field-based staff, and other points of contact within a given jurisdiction.

The SSU continues to support and advance strategic science efforts across the CDC COVID-19 Emergency Response by coordinating scientific activity and publications tracking in alignment with the *Science Agenda*, providing early scientific review and facilitating key collaborations. Importantly, these practical applications in strategic science can be readily translated and applied to future Response frameworks.

Direct questions related to the *Science Agenda* or the new *Priority Science Questions* to the SSU of the CDC COVID-19 Response at [EOCevent538@cdc.gov](mailto:EOCevent538@cdc.gov). Officers interested in learning more about deployments to SSU can contact LCDR Teresa Wang at [yxn7@cdc.gov](mailto:yxn7@cdc.gov).

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/science-agenda-covid19.htm>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/science-agenda-covid19.html#anchor\\_1615997259799](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/more/science-agenda-covid19.html#anchor_1615997259799)

# SciPAC Fist Bump—LCDR Colleen Scott & LT Marisa Hast

LCDR Colleen Scott and LT Marisa Hast conducted an investigation that identified nine clusters of COVID-19 cases involving 13 educators and 32 students at six elementary schools. From their investigation, LCDR Scott and LT Hast were able to report that initial infections among educators play a substantial role in in-school SARS-CoV-2 transmission and subsequent chains of infection to other educators, students, and households, highlighting the importance of preventing infections among educators in particular. Their outstanding work was published in the CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR) (<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7008e4>) and their paper was featured in a White House briefing on February 22, 2021, addressing important mitigation measures in schools for reopening, including vaccination of teachers. Congratulations to LCDR Scott and LT Hast for a job well done!



LCDR Colleen Scott and LT Marisa Hast

# SciPAC Fist Bump—LCDR Sharoda Dasgupta

Congratulations to CDC Scientist Officer LCDR Sharoda Dasgupta on leading the publication “Differences in rapid increases in county-level COVID-19 incidence by implementation of statewide closures and mask mandates — United States, June 1–September 30, 2020,” which was published in *Annals of Epidemiology*. This was the first national CDC analysis demonstrating that counties in states with longer statewide closures or statewide mask mandates at reopening were less likely to have rapid increases in COVID-19 rates, particularly in nonmetropolitan areas. These findings underscore the value of using mitigation strategies to prevent COVID-19 spread, especially in nonmetropolitan areas, and particularly during periods of high incidence. Recognizing the importance of this paper in contributing to the growing literature on the utility of community mitigation strategies, findings were shared with the CDC Director and other CDC COVID-19 response leadership, and during a recent Senate Committee hearing. For more information, read LCDR Dasgupta’s publication here: <https://bit.ly/3qOqshn>.



LCDR Sharoda Dasgupta

# Officer Spotlight: CDR Erin Sauber-Schatz



CDR Erin Sauber-Schatz



Sauber-Schatz prepares to dive.

(Excerpted from *The 'disease detective' who dives: Former Texas A&M Diver now leader in fight against COVID-19*):

“Long before she served as lead of a task force for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s COVID-19 emergency response, Cmdr. Erin Sauber-Schatz was a springboard and platform diver for Texas A&M.

‘The CDC is 24/7, so the training and dedication that you have as a student-athlete can carry over into these 12- to 14-hour workdays and weekends,’ said Sauber-Schatz, who leads the Community Interventions and Critical Populations Task Force. ‘Even when you’re tired or feel defeated, you keep going, and you keep pursuing that level of excellence you know that you’re capable of reaching.’ ”

The full article can be found on the NCAA website:

<https://www.ncaa.org/student-athletes/former-student-athlete/disease-detective-who-dives>

# *The Scientist Officer Editorial Team*

<b>Visibility Subcommittee Chair</b>	LCDR Iram Hassan
<b>Editor-in-Chief</b>	LCDR Hilda Razzaghi
<b>Associate Editor-in-Chief</b>	LT Kelly Shaw
<b>Copy Editors</b>	CDR David Huang LCDR NaTasha Hollis
<b>Layout Editor</b>	LT Brad Goodwin
<b>Associate Layout Editors</b>	LT Megan Peck LT Adi Rosario
<b>Editorial Board</b>	CDR Minglei Cui LT Michelle Lin LCDR Shiny Mathew LCDR Oliver Ou LCDR Angela Thompson-Paul

If you would like to submit an advertisement, announcement, article, or photo to *The Scientist Officer*, please contact the Editorial Team at [scipacnewsletter@cdc.gov](mailto:scipacnewsletter@cdc.gov)

Check out past issues of *The Scientist Officer* at <https://dcp.psc.gov/osg/scientist/newsletter.aspx>