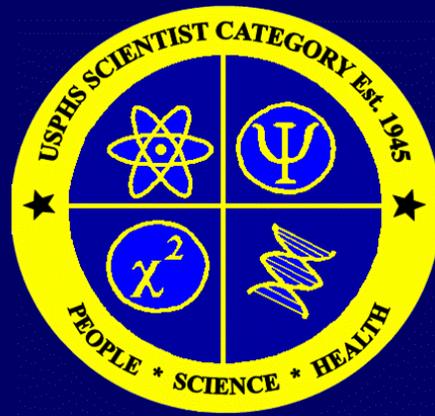


# The Scientist Officer



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Pictured above are temporary medical tents used during the Hurricane Maria response in Puerto Rico. To date, USPHS Commissioned Corps officers and NDMS staff have provided care to over 1,000 people in Puerto Rico. See page 12 for one Scientist Officer's account of his deployment to Puerto Rico.

# Greetings from the SciPAC Chair



I am thrilled to write my first article as SciPAC chair for the 2017-2018 operational year. I've been a member of SciPAC for 10 years and am happy to be able to further shape our fantastic PAC! For this issue, I would like to describe some initiatives for the year on which I am working with the Executive Board and subcommittees.

Our Executive Secretary, CDR Loren Rodgers, has already instituted simpler general meeting roll call

attendance procedures and has been streamlining communications through a weekly digest. Our COF Liaison, LCDR Jason Wilken, is working with the Visibility Subcommittee (SC) to encourage alternate revenue streams, such as collecting donations from Scientist Officers during social events, so that our budget can go toward more than just award plaques. It was a pleasure to have co-hosted one of these revenue-raising social events with our former PAC Chair, CDR Jennifer Adjemian, for our Mad Scientist Halloween party on October 28.

For our Awards SC, I am excited to reinstate recognition and awards for our retiring officers. We began this initiative by recognizing RADM Helena Mishoe for her nearly 30 years of service, her tenure as CPO, and for serving as a flag officer, which is rare in our category. For the Career Development SC, we plan to release a singular CV guidance

document by the end of the year and begin a weekly job vacancy list. For Category Day, we are going to increase the focus on career development and deployment and augment the number of the fantastic Sci-Talks from last year. For Mentoring, we are going to work on ensuring quicker matches, monitoring the success of those matches, and simplifying the process to maintain successful matches. The Policy SC will be producing brief, user-friendly versions of new PHS policies. Recruitment and Retention is currently scoring new applicants and will then focus on helping approved applicants navigate the commissioning process. Rules and Membership SC has already established a schedule for SC SOP updates, a new improvement for the year. The Science SC will work to highlight Scientists' efforts that align with the new SG's priorities. The Visibility SC will be highlighting efforts of multiple SCs and will be working on documenting the history of SciPAC. Finally, the Website SC will be working with each SC to update their website and will be creating a SciPAC Calendar of Events to put all events and deadlines in one place.

Finally, I want to thank CAPT Martin Sanders for his 4+ years of service as the Chief Scientist Officer. His dedication in helping officers improve their promotion packages and advocate for the needs of the PAC while providing candid advice regarding career development is greatly appreciated. I especially want to highlight his continued involvement in the last few months that were past the expiration of his term; he could easily have faded into the woodwork, but has remained our advocate during this time. We look forward to working closely with CAPT John Eckert, our new Chief Scientist Officer.

**By CDR Robin Toblin**

# Senior Officer Spotlight: CDR James Kenney



In this edition of *The Scientist Officer*, we recognize CDR James L. Kenney for our Senior Officer Spotlight column. CDR Kenney received his B.S. degree in Health Sciences from Drake University, M.S. degree in Health Sciences from Eastern Washington University, and D.Sc. degree in Applied Anatomy and Physiology from Boston University. CDR Kenney joined USPHS as a Scientist Officer in 2008, and started to work at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research (CBER) office. Since then, he has taken on roles with increasing responsibilities at FDA CBER: Inspection Team Member, Validation Manager, Team Lead, Chief, and Division Director (acting). Commensurate billets (O-4 to O-6) were assigned to him in recognition of increasing leadership roles and programmatic moves.

CDR Kenney currently holds dual leadership positions: (1) Division Director (acting), Division of Biological Standards & Quality Control (DBSQC), Office of Compliance & Biologic Quality (OCBQ), CBER; and (2) Chief, Laboratories of Microbiology, In-Vivo Testing & Standards, in the same Division. In these positions, CDR Kenney has been spearheading numerous projects to advance the regulatory control of biologics. Below are just selected highlights to showcase the significant impact of his work:

- Establishment and implementation of CBER's Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) to modernize the CBER's quality assurance information management.
- Achieving accreditation to ISO 17034 for CBER's Standards and Reagents Production, Inventory and Distribution Operations. These standards and reagents upon qualification are being used across the globe by manufacturers and international regulatory authorities.
- Planning and directing the lot release testing of licensed biological products, which are directly used in patients upon release. This directly safeguards patients from receiving poor quality biologics.
- Planning and directing communications with external stakeholders (e.g., World Health Organization) regarding issues that have an impact on international public health.
- Serving as subject matter expert on the United States Pharmacopoeia's (USP) Modern Microbiological Methods Expert Panel. USP provides quality standards for the United States, and serves as the gold standard on many quality-related issues world-wide.

Most PHS Officers are asked this question at some point: why did you join PHS? So I posed the same question to CDR Kenney. His answer, resembling the true spirit of a public health professional, enlightened me! Between 1993-2008, CDR Kenney served as a Research Physiologist in the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicines (USARIEM) in Massachusetts and at the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infections Disease (USAMRIID) in Maryland. In those 15 years, he worked on applied human physiological research in extreme environments,

*(Continued on page 4)*

biophysics and biomedical modeling, molecular biology, immunology and developing countermeasures for select agents. All this training and experience led him to seek a bigger role in the public health arena. For CDR Kenney, the U.S. Public Health Service became an obvious option in 2008.

CDR Kenney is very active and has been serving a leading role in readiness, preparedness, and deployment in PHS. Currently he is the Deputy Commander for the Regional Incident Support Team (RIST, Tier 1) in the National Capital Region (NCR). In this role, he oversees accountability and leads assigned team deployments. So far, he has led or participated in 15 deployments. On reflection, CDR Kenney found the deployment with the USPHS Ebola Response the most fulfilling. In 2014, he joined the Monrovia Medical Unit 1 (MMU-1) in Liberia, where he established a laboratory in the hot zone (high-risk area) and worked for two months. He served on this deployment with a high level of confidence and efficiency, partly due to his extensive biosafety level 3 and 4 training and experience received while working at USAMRIID.

CDR Kenney is very keen on mentoring the next generation of PHS officers and civilian scientists. He enjoys sharing his experiences and interacting with junior employees. Currently he mentors three PHS officers formally, and two other officers informally. CDR Kenney states that "a successful career is finding opportunities to make a significant difference that will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of an organization long after he/she leaves." This includes mentoring others, as there is no success without a successor. CDR Kenney strongly advises junior officers to update their CVs on a regular basis (e.g., once a month). Updating one's CV frequently will allow junior officers to reflect on their achievements and assist them in career planning decisions, thus supporting promotion success.

CDR Kenney is married, and has three children and two grandchildren. He loves traveling, reading, skiing, and camping. He is especially fond of traveling to China with his wife, and his mandarin is very impressive to a native Chinese speaker such as myself. He finds that his fluency in Chinese makes his China trips a lot more fun.

We are honored and delighted to recognize CDR James L. Kenney for this issue's Senior Officer Spotlight. CDR Kenney, thank you for all your work and continued efforts toward improving the field of public health. Your active engagement in mentoring junior officers makes a significant difference to the Public Health Service.

**By LCDR Geoffrey Wu**



CDR Kenney entering the MMU 'Hot Zone' Laboratory.

**"A successful career is finding opportunities to make a significant difference that will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of an organization long after he/she leaves."**

**- CDR James L. Kenney**

## Junior Officer Spotlight: LCDR Oliver Ou

**N**ext time you sink your fork into that juicy steak, you should thank LCDR Oliver Ou for ensuring that it is safe to eat. After graduating with his Ph.D. in Pharmacology from State University of New York, Buffalo, LCDR Ou was completing a post-doctoral fellowship at the National Cancer Institute (NCI) in Bethesda when he first learned about the United States Public Health Services (USPHS). Based on the positive feedback from other Commissioned Corps officers such as CDR Fei Xu, CDR Ruiqing Pamboukian, and CAPT Sally Hu, LCDR Ou was inspired to join the Corps in 2013. He has not regretted that decision for a moment!

This Scientist Officer has made a career transition going from bench to bedside at NCI and farm to fork at the USDA. Since commissioning, LCDR Oliver Ou has been a regulatory scientist in the Laboratory Quality Assurance Staff (LQAS) of USDA-Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS). In this role, he re-



views analytical chemistry validation data packages in support of the USDA FSIS laboratory system, audits FSIS laboratories, and assists the Accredited Laboratory Program (ALP) Administrator in managing the FSIS ALP program. It is his responsibility to ensure that the meat that we eat is safe by confirming pesticide residue, veterinary drugs, and hormones are lower than harmful levels for human consumption.

His biggest professional achievement, thus far, has been his critical contribution to streamline the ALP to improve efficiency and to gain the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) accreditation as a proficiency testing (PT) provider three years ahead of schedule. The ALP is the one of very few accredited PT providers in the federal government and the only one for food chemistry and chemical residues in meat and poultry products. In his interdisciplinary review work, he works col-

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# Greater NY COA Branch Hosts USPHS Officers and Surgeon General, VADM Jerome Adams, in 7<sup>th</sup> Consecutive NYC Veterans Day Parade

On Saturday, November 11, 2017, over 40 Commissioned Corps Officers marched in the 98<sup>th</sup> Annual New York City Veterans Day Parade. The parade kicked off at 11:11 a.m., commemorating the conclusion of WWI, which ended at 11:00 a.m. on November 11, 1918. This year, our guest of honor was the 20<sup>th</sup> Surgeon General of the United States, VADM Jerome Adams, whose attendance marked the first time a current Surgeon General marched alongside the USPHS in the Veterans Day Parade. Following tradition since 2011, the Greater New York Branch of COA (NYCOA) hosted Officers from various states and COA branches. This year, we were joined by Officers from Maryland, Alabama, Georgia, and Texas.

The evening before the parade, we were joined by VADM Adams at 5<sup>th</sup> and Madison, a restaurant in midtown Manhattan. VADM Adams took the time to speak to and pose for photographs with all Officers, demonstrating his quite personable and friendly demeanor, as well as his commitment to the Corps. The NYCOA provided VADM Adams with a t-shirt from the NYCOA Merchandise Committee, which features all seven services and reads, "7 Missions=1 Goal... To Protect & Serve Our Nation," which the Surgeon General later sported in photographs. He was also provided signature coins from the NYCOA to take home to his children.

On the morning of the parade, VADM Adams proudly represented the Commissioned Corps at events, including the NYC Mayor's breakfast, opening ceremony, and the VIP march, during which he marched the entire parade route alongside dignitaries and flag

officers from other uniformed services. An arctic blast hit New York City on the evening prior to the parade, with temperatures hitting a low of 29°F on the morning of the parade, and peaking at only 40°F by the afternoon. Despite the frigid temperatures, after staging and rehearsing for a couple of hours, our marching Officers began their initial strides at 26<sup>th</sup> Street and Fifth Avenue. Our Officers marched along Manhattan's Fifth Avenue in their Service Dress Blues to the cadence of LT Danny Benbassat (Scientist). Though unable to feel their fingers and toes, our Officers could still feel a very deep sense of unrelenting pride and honor, as they demonstrated their esprit de corps, amongst their fellow service men and women.

Officers then approached the reviewing stage at 42<sup>nd</sup> Street as the USPHS was announced while they crossed the red carpet laid out in the

street across from the New York Public Library. The USPHS was broadcast on live television as our Officers marched past the reviewing stage, with the Color Guard saluting the spectators on the stage. VADM Adams then joined the formation with his beautiful family: his wife, two sons, and daughter. His family led our Officers as they marched just behind the USPHS Commissioned Corps banner and just in front of the Color Guard for the duration of the parade to 52<sup>nd</sup> Street. VADM Adams and his family proudly waved to and thanked the patriotic spectators who cheered



Color Guard (L to R): CDR Peter Lenahan (HSO), LCDR George Pourakis (Medical), CDR Karina Aguilar (HSO), and LT Samantha DiMisa (Scientist), joined by NYCOA Officers and Officers from Maryland, Alabama, Georgia, and Texas.

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*(NYC Veteran's Day Parade, continued from page 6)*

in support of our mission and service. At the conclusion of the march, our Officers, along with the Surgeon General and his family, then walked to Rockefeller Center, dressed with some 200 patriotic American flags, where we posed for group and individual photographs with VADM Adams. Just as we began the day with USPHS chants, we said goodbye with a final thank you to VADM Adams and his family by singing the Public Health Service March.

This year's parade marked the centennial of America's entry into the First World War in 1917. The parade honors all branches of service, to include our veterans and active duty officers. Featured in the parade are over 250 groups and more than 20,000 participants, including veterans of all eras, military units, civic and youth groups (including Junior ROTC), businesses, and top high school marching bands from across America. Floats and military and vintage vehicles were also highlighted. To our fellow Corps Officers from around the country, we hope you will consider joining the Greater NYCOA next year to continue our seven-year tradition of participating in the NYC Veterans Day Parade, viewed by over half a million onlookers! This is a very unique and quite powerful way for the Commissioned Corps to meet and hear from the American people it serves!

*By LT Samantha DiMisa*

*Photos by LCDR Osamede C. Onaghise (HSO)*



Banner held by LTJG Mouhamed Halwani (HSO) and CDR Neil Vora (Medical), alongside NYCOA Officers and Officers from Maryland, Alabama, Georgia, and Texas, joined by Surgeon General, VADM Jerome Adams.



LT Samantha DiMisa (Scientist) with Surgeon General, VADM Jerome Adams.

# Scientist Officers Gather for SciPAC Socials

## Summer 2017 SciPAC Trivia Night (Atlanta, GA)

On Wednesday, August 9, eight Scientist officers came together for trivia night fun at the CDC/Emory University-area Mellow Mushroom pizza house. Our “Team SciPAC” enjoyed pizza and refreshments while competing with five other teams for the most correct responses to trivia questions on music, movies, history, art, and literature. A great time was had by all. Team SciPAC is proud to report that we came in 2<sup>nd</sup> place! Pictured below from left to right: LCDR Zewditu Demissie, LCDR Ginny Barton Bowen, LT Brad Goodwin, CDR Timothy Cunningham, LT Kathleen Chapman Harnett, LT Jessica Tomov (not pictured, CDR Kamil Barbour and LCDR Marcienne Wright).



## SciPAC welcomes the 2017 incoming class of CDC Epidemic Intelligence Service Scientist Officers at the EISO Scientist Officer Social (Atlanta, GA)

On Saturday, July 13, 2017, several SciPAC members gathered at Tin Lizzy’s in Emory Point to welcome the CDC Epidemic Intelligence Service 2017 incoming class of Scientist Officers. Congratulations and welcome incoming officers! Pictured above are senior SciPAC members along with new 2017 EISO Scientists identified from left to right: LTs Michelle Hughes, Kathleen Harnett, Jennifer Beauregard, Carolyn Herzog, Leora Feldstein, Lindsay Womack, and Roberta Horth.

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### Atlanta Beltline Walk (Atlanta, GA)

On Saturday, October 14, Atlanta-area Scientists met up on the Eastside Beltline trail. Officers in attendance included: CDRs Kamil Barbour (and his son) and Timothy Cunningham, LCDRs Zewditu Demissie and Shayne Gallaway (and his dog), and LTs Ruth Link-Gelles (and her husband) and Jennifer Beauregard. Officers walked (and chased CDR Barbour's son) on the Beltline and enjoyed brunch together at Krog Street Market.

Pictured in photo on right, from left to right: LCDR Zewditu Demissie, CDR Timothy Cunningham, LCDR Shayne Gallaway, LT Jennifer Beauregard, LT Ruth Link-Gelles, CDR Kamil Barbour.



Atlanta Social updates by CDR Kamil Barbour, LCDR Marcienne Wright, and LT Ruth Link-Gelles



### NYCOA Social Event (New York, NY)

Surgeon General, VADM Jerome Adams and NYCOA Officers at the NYCOA Social Event held on the eve of the NYC Veterans Day Parade. Scientist Officers LCDR Iram Hassan and LT Samantha DiMisa are seated to the right of VADM Adams. Photo credit: LCDR Osamede C. Onaghise (HSO).

by LT Samantha DeMisa

# A Spooky Good Time: Mad Science and Halloween!

DC-area Scientist officers enjoyed the first DC-area Scientist Halloween Party on the evening of October 28. The event, which hopefully will become an annual soiree, was held at SciPAC Chair CDR Robin Toblin's house and co-hosted by CDR Jennifer Adjemian. Some 35 people, both officers and their guests, gathered in CDR Toblin's basement for good food and drink and got a chance to know each other out of uniform and in costume. Officers had a great time getting to meet so many of their fellow officers, who they may not have had a chance to meet before, despite living in the same area. We had six voting members in attendance, a great turnout from leadership.

Officers were encouraged to dress up and go mad, and go mad they



LCDR Oliver Ou and wife Valerie

did! You never knew who was going to be under each mask or behind a dazzling wig (CAPT Sara Newman). From Bunsen and Beaker (LCDR Jonathan Leshin and spouse) to Chewbacca (LCDR Oliver Ou), from a Roman centurion (CDR Matthew Newland) to the new Halloween favorite of David S. Pumpkins and skeleton (CDR Adjemian and spouse), this party featured officers letting loose! More photos

are available on the Facebook Page (join now!).

Results from the costume contest are as follows: Best Socks award goes to LCDR Luz Rivera, whose great socks matched well with her American Graffiti costume; Best Mad Scientist Costume goes to CDR Erin Nichols (and her spouse, Joey) for a lab scientist and mouse; and best shtick goes to CAPT Newman, who turned into her costume in the best possible way!



LCDR Jonathan Leshin and wife Yvonne

A big thanks to CDR Adjemian, LCDR Lana Rossiter, and LCDR Leshin for helping set up and provide food for the evening, and a huge thank you to CDR Toblin for both volunteering her home for the event and providing so many of the snacks for the evening. The SciPAC Social committees are interested in expanding this to Atlanta and repeating again for next year in DC, so officers who are interested in hosting and/or planning in either of those areas, please let CDR Kamil Barbour ([iyk1@cdc.gov](mailto:iyk1@cdc.gov)) know.

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CAPT Sara Newman and husband David



CDR Adjemian and husband Mike



CDR Heidi Daniels and CDR Matthew Newland



LCDR Luz Rivera and friend Mark



CDR Judy Facey with CDR David Huang and his wife, Ellen

For more information on DC-area SciPAC social events or to help plan the next event, please contact LCDR Jonathan Leshin ([jonathan.leshin@fda.hhs.gov](mailto:jonathan.leshin@fda.hhs.gov)) or LCDR Tyann Blessington ([Tyann.blessington@fda.hhs.gov](mailto:Tyann.blessington@fda.hhs.gov)).

**By LCDR Jonathan Leshin**

# Deployments to Puerto Rico for Hurricanes Irma and Maria, September – November 2017

In what will likely go down as the costliest hurricane season on record, 2017 has provided many opportunities for Scientist Officers to support several major hurricane response efforts, whether at the Emergency Management Group (EMG), in the field, or remotely. Two Scientist Officers recently deployed to Puerto Rico (PR) to respond to not just one, but two of this season's major hurricanes, working as part of the Incident Response Coordination Team (IRCT) in response to Hurricanes Irma and Maria. While there is a lot to share from these experiences, I'm sharing a few highlights from our deployment to give you a taste of what it was like.

Two days after the eye of Hurricane Irma, then a Category 5 storm, skirted north of San Juan on September 6, CDRs Eduardo Gomez-Saladin and I arrived in PR not knowing the challenges that lay ahead of us. We were two of three National Incident Support Team (NIST) augmentees assigned to the IRCT's Planning Section for Hurricane Irma, and both of us were initially planning to stay for 14 days. Our primary tasks were to track people and resources, compile and summarize information, and help maintain situational awareness for the IRCT, which was supporting several medical missions in PR and the US Virgin Islands (USVI).

At the time, much of PR was without power, but conditions in St. Thomas and St. John were even worse, with lack of power compounded by significant communications and transportation challenges. Even so, IRCT was able to make a significant impact by deploying several Disaster



*CDRs Gomez-Saladin and Huang hard at work as part of the IRCT.*

Medical Assistance Teams (DMATs) across PR and the USVI to perform tasks such as emergency department augmentation, dialysis patient treatment, and patient reception for American citizens repatriating from other Caribbean islands to PR. Furthermore, the health care infrastructure in St. Thomas was so crippled that more than 150 dialysis patients were soon evacuated to San Juan for further dialysis treatment, as disruptions in dialysis treatment can become life-threatening within two or three days.

A little over a week later, it was becoming apparent that another major hurricane, Maria, was forming and heading toward many of the same Caribbean islands that were hit by Hurricane Irma. In preparation for the impending

storm, HHS personnel were evacuated to San Juan or to the mainland, and all medical missions in PR and the USVI were suspended. CDR Gomez-Galadin's demobilization date was moved up a few days to allow him to return home before the storm hit, while I was able to arrange a one week extension of my deployment. Since I was not sure if I would

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be returning home before my APFT expired at the end of September, I asked him to serve as my testing official the day before he left (and two days before Hurricane Maria hit). Fortunately, our hotel fitness center had the necessary equipment for me to successfully complete my test.

With CDR Gomez-Saladin gone and the IRCT's medical missions in PR and the USVI suspended, I initially thought that September 19, the day

before Hurricane Maria hit, was going to be a calm day. It turned out to be not only the most physically and mentally exhausting day, but also the most rewarding day of my deployment. The day started out like any other, with an 0700 general staff meeting. It soon became clear that IRCT volunteers were needed to help load about 130 dialysis patients and their family members from the Puerto Rico Convention Center in San Juan to busses, and then busses to a plane at the San Juan airport ahead of the quickly approaching storm. Our work at the convention center included helping patients pack their belongings and providing them with moral support. It was clear from several of my conversations with them that

many were scared, having left their damaged homes in the USVI for the unknown in PR and now moving to Miami, not knowing if and when they would ever see their homes again. Although we were providing them with the lifeline they needed to survive, many were emotional as they faced yet another journey to an unfamiliar place.



*CDR Gomez-Saladin serves as the testing official for CDR Huang's APFT at the Doubletree Hotel in San Juan.*

Fast forward to a scene at the San Juan airport around 1200. Away from the main passenger terminal and equipped with only a single set of jet stairs, we were faced with the daunting task of loading all 130 patients (many of whom were wheelchair-bound) and family members onto the plane with a "wheels up" deadline of 1500. Compounded with the usual PR heat and humidity, and winds that were starting to pick up, it was a grueling task that I'm proud to say we successfully completed, working together with staff from the IRCT, several DMATs, and FEMA.

Some government officials thought the task couldn't be done. But it was certainly a wonderfully satisfying feeling to be a part of something greater than myself. And what makes the story even more meaningful to me is that several of my USPHS friends who were deployed to South Florida later told me that they received and treated these same dialysis patients in the days that followed!

Having never gone through a hurricane before, Hurricane Maria itself was an experience I'll never forget. The heavy winds and rain started in the evening of September 19 and didn't let up for almost 24 hours. I slept for

only one-hour stretches at a time because the wind and rains were so strong. The next morning, we were awakened at 0600 and asked to shelter in place in the hallway of our hotel, where we stayed until about 1500, when the worst of the storm had passed. Although our hotel sustained some damage, we actually never lost power during the storm, as

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the hotel's generator kicked in during the night. But even without venturing out, it was clear the storm had inflicted significant damage to the surrounding area just by looking out our windows. And IRCT operations started back up again that evening, so there was little rest for the weary.

In the days that followed, much of our time was spent just trying to get situational awareness on PR and the USVI. But that proved to be even more challenging with Hurricane Maria than Hurricane Irma because of the significant further damage to the infrastructure of both PR and the USVI. The entire island of PR was left without power, leaving only those fortunate to have generators with electricity. With cellular towers destroyed or damaged, cell phone service was spotty throughout all of the islands. Significant damage to roads and airport control towers, as well as widespread debris, meant that transportation was challenging if not impossible. And with fuel (for cars and generators), cash, food, and water in short supply in most areas, there were growing concerns about security issues.

Over time, some things got better, and we were able to start assessing needs around PR and the USVI. Eventually, a hub and spoke model for HHS medical operations in PR and the

USVI was adopted in coordination with the PR and USVI Departments of Health, as well as the Department of Defense (DOD). I returned home about a week and a half after Hurricane Maria hit PR, and about two weeks later, CDR Gomez-Saladin returned for a second deployment.

All told, CDR Gomez-Saladin served several roles for the two responses in PR: 1) Resource Lead for Planning for Hurricane Irma (September 8–18), and 2) Situation Lead for Planning (October 9–24) and Liaison officer (October 25–November 13) for Hurricane Maria. Meanwhile, I served as the Situation Lead for Planning for Hurricane Irma (September 8–19) and Hurricane Maria (September 20–29). While the work was difficult and stressful, and we certainly made sacrifices in being away from our friends, family, and workplace, our 69 days of combined deployment and estimated 900+ hours of work are but a small token of support for the people of PR and the USVI, who certainly will be rebuilding for many months and even years to come.



*CDR Huang (in USPHS shirt at the bottom of the jet stairs) helps to load USVI dialysis patients at the San Juan Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport who were being evacuated to Miami ahead of impending Hurricane Maria.*

**By CDR David Huang**

*(More photos on page 15)*



*View from CDR Huang's hotel window the day before (**top**) and on the day that Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico (**bottom**).*

# Leaving Home for a New Duty Assignment

**M**y last permanent change of station move was 20 years ago while in the Army. After that last assignment, I had happily returned to my mountainous home state of Colorado, where it is said the sun shines 360 days a year. The prospect of leaving home to relocate to the frigid “Northland” of Duluth, Minnesota, in January 2017 seemed to be a dreaded task. Truth be told, I was sad to leave our home, dear friends, the Rocky Mountains, and even my caring veterinary clinic behind (yes, it’s the seemingly replaceable things one takes for granted that are missed!). Nonetheless, I knew I had to dive into this move for professional growth within my agency and to meet PHS promotion benchmarks.

So, uprooting my husband and his job as well, we arrived in Duluth during the coldest month of the year, when the temperature was -20°F and felt like -40°F with the wind chill, and snow totals are at least 100

inches and don’t melt until May. We moved from a most pleasant four-season, high-altitude state to what seemed to be a mostly three-season state. Duluth has a glacial winter in subzero conditions for weeks on end, followed by fierce winter weather, with temperatures not rising above freezing, and when 15°F seemed like the most welcoming weather to escape cabin fever. This is followed by a brief, humid, bug-filled summer, during which time I just wanted to avoid contracting the

dreaded Lyme disease everybody was warning me about and which apparently is rampant in this part of the state - an epidemic, they said. Locals were amused as they informed me about the plethora of ways to remove or prevent said ticks. Recounting the many times and ways they had Lyme disease, like it was a glorious war story, seemed to nearly be a form of entertainment for them as I dreaded the worst.



LCDR Charlotte Francia with her dog on four feet of Lake Superior ice.

So, how did I adjust just 150 miles south of the Canadian border in Winter Wonderland? Well, I reminded myself that even though making changes gets increasingly more difficult as we get older, it is a positive thing, and it helps to feel content and grateful for what we have in life. To experience new surroundings, new people, the upper Midwest culture of the hardy and robust Northlanders, and a new billet with new challenges, are all opportunities to not only improve oneself, but also deepen one’s appreciation for what one already has. Even though being homesick is not a pleasant experience, it was very pleasant to be warmly welcomed by my co-workers to my new Bureau of Prisons duty station at the Federal Prison Camp in Duluth, as well as by local residents I met out and about on snowy trails with my dogs and in the community.

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# Housekeeping Lessons Before a Wintry Weather Deployment

It has been documented that there are stressors during deployments: emotional, physical, behavioral, social, loneliness, financial, family, etc. However, nothing prepared me for a major challenge experienced during my Ebola response deployment to the CDC Chicago Quarantine Station at the O'Hare International Airport, where I was stationed from January to March 2015. A month into my deployment, my home security company perceived movement in my house in Atlanta, and I received a security breach call. Unknown to them, the movement was not due to a security breach, but due to sheetrock falling from the ceiling as a result of broken water pipes that had caused damage in the living, dining, and kitchen areas of my home. Despite this news, with the support of my spouse, I was able to stay in Chicago to complete the remaining one month of deployment. I was a little stressed, worried, and anxious, but I was able to use coping strategies to successfully complete my deployment. Unfortunately, I came back home to face time-consuming repairs and remodeling of the house.

## My Coping Strategies

- **Focus:** I remained positive, prayed, and focused on what I could control rather than what I could not control. This strategy helped me to focus on my tertiary screening assignment and on helping others.
- **Family support:** My spouse was very supportive of the deployment in that he communicated with me frequently to provide me with necessary information, supervised the cleaning and drying of the damaged areas, and contacted the insurance company to negotiate repairs. Other family members provided support in different capacities. Their combined efforts helped me focus on my commitment to complete the deployment.
- **Physical Activity:** I maintained my daily exercise routine and often went for brisk walks with co-walkers at lunch time to restore and maintain my body and mind in a relaxed state. I also discussed the damages with co-workers and other officers to reduce the anxiety I felt.
- **Home Insurance:** Having a home insurance policy that covered parts of the damages, repairs, and replacement of losses was reassuring.

## Lessons Learned

- Insulate home pipes and water supply lines - especially those buried within the external walls of the house - to prevent the pipes from rupturing due to excess pressure from freezing water.
- When there is no one in the house to keep the water running through regular use, you can prevent water inside the pipes from freezing by allowing the water to seep from the faucets served by exposed pipes.
- Keep the heat on and the thermostat set to the same temperature day and night. Keep warm air circulating around plumbing by opening cabinets beneath sinks in the kitchen and bathrooms to keep the pipes warm. Most insurance policies will not cover damages caused by a burst

*(Continued on page 18)*

*(Housekeeping Lessons during a Wintry Weather Deployment, continued from page 17)*

frozen pipe unless the heat within the house was maintained at a steady temperature.

- Designate family members or friends to check on your house regularly while you are away, or have a form of alert to notify you, e.g. motion detector, security companies, etc.
- Know who to contact in emergencies and how to contact them, such as your insurance carrier and agents, plumbers, etc.
- Ensure that your insurance is up to date and you are covered for the full value of the contents of your home.

Prepare your home for possible freezing temperatures if you deploy during the winter, even, and perhaps especially, if extreme wintry weather is not normal for your area!



Photos above show the extensive damage in the living/dining areas and the ruptured pipes that caused the damage.

***By LCDR Folasade (Sade) Kembi***

*(Leaving Home—PCS Experience, continued from page 16)*

I learned about not falling through the ice of a lake, when to plug in my car so my engine does not freeze up, driving safely or knowing when not to drive during ice storms, having enough firewood chopped for the time when the power company shuts off heat during peak usage hours in double-digit negative temperatures, and taking other extreme cold weather precautions. Thanks to the local weatherman, I also know at what temperature and after how many minutes my nose will freeze off! Most of all, I can smile at myself while the Northlanders get a good laugh because they caught me having subconsciously adopted their monophthongal vowel, most famously portrayed in the movie “*Fargo*.” Upon my arrival, I had found the dialect to be rather amusing, but what used to be “Minnesota” for me is now “Minnesoota,” and “No” is now an exaggerated “Nooooo,” and “You know” is now “Dontcha knooow.” It has now been nine months. I’m bracing myself for the winter that is about to begin, which, according to the Almanac and locals, is not going to be as mild as the last one. I guess it’s all relative.

***By LCDR Charlotte Francia***

# ID Week 2017

Despite a massive outbreak of hepatitis A in San Diego, California, IDWeek, an annual conference convened by the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA), the Society for Healthcare Epidemiology of America (SHEA), the HIV Medicine Association (HIVMA), and the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society (PIDS), proceeded from October 4–7, 2017. Over 8,000 attendees enjoyed the combination of temperate San Diego weather and cutting-edge infectious disease research, while observing good hand hygiene.

The IDweek program balanced presentations that described the challenges of infectious diseases, including sessions on antimicrobial resistance, infections related to the rising opioid epidemic, and spreading fungal infections, with presentations that described the development of new tools to overcome these challenges, including sessions on probiotics, big data, and non-traditional strategies for combatting common infections. The opening plenary session featured Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, who discussed the global threat of emerging and pandemic diseases. Dr. Margaret Hamburg, with the National Academy of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, replied to his call to arms with a presentation describing the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), which is a new alliance to coordinate the development of vaccines.

Seven Scientist Officers attended the conference and provided 12 presentations on a range of infectious disease topics. LT Matthew Stuckey provided an oral presentation of his investigation of contaminated organ transplant preservation fluid, LCDR Rachel Slayton presented an informative session on mathematical modeling, CDR Aimee Geissler discussed the challenge of culture-independent diagnostic testing, LT Ruth Link-Gelles presented about antiviral treatment among hepatitis B-infected pregnant women, and LCDR Matt Lozier presented about the persistence of Zika virus in serum and semen. CDR Jennifer Adjemian presented a poster on nontuberculous mycobacterial lung disease, and LT Emily Mosites presented two posters on an outbreak of group A Streptococcus. Although the incubation period has not yet passed, none of the PHS officers who attended the meeting has shown signs of acute hepatitis A as of this writing.

IDweek provided the opportunity for infectious disease professionals to engage in discussions that urge the state of the science forward. The conference also promoted new insights and, it is hoped, offered a brief reprieve for the embattled public health officials on the front lines of the Hepatitis A outbreak in San Diego.

**By LT Emily Mosites**



From left to right: LT Ruth Link-Gelles, LT Emily Mosites, LT Matthew Stuckey, and LCDR Rachel Slayton at IDWeek.

# PACE and SciPAC at Camp Rehoboth

While the duties of United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps officers are often spoken about at the national level, PHS officers continuously engage with local communities through various outreach activities. One of the growing opportunities through which Scientist Officers have demonstrated this local-level commitment is involvement in the Prevention through Active Community Engagement (PACE) program. PACE calls for officers to actively engage schools and communities while educating the public about the Commissioned Corps, the National Prevention Strategy, and Office of the Surgeon General initiatives.

In July 2017, LCDRs Shondelle Wilson-Frederick and Israel Cross attended Camp Rehoboth in Baltimore, MD, to conduct science experiments and present PACE program information to approximately 50 children ranging in grade from kindergarten through high school. Camp Rehoboth is an annual scholastic program for school-aged children that is sponsored by a local church. At the beginning of the year, both LCDRs Cross and Wilson-Frederick arranged a meeting with church leadership to describe the mission of the USPHS and the PACE initiative. Through this collaboration, these officers have been invited to present annually at Camp Rehoboth and are exploring similar opportunities at other summer camps in the Baltimore area.

Before getting into the experiments, the officers began with an overview of the USPHS—who we are, our mission, and why we were at their camp. LCDRs Cross and Wilson-Frederick then presented information about the National Prevention Strategy, and set aside some time for questions and answers primarily on physical activity and healthy eating. Much to the officers' enjoyment, the children were so interested in these two topics, the officers focused almost exclusively on these two elements of the National Prevention Strategy.

One of the “luxuries” of PACE is that officers can draw from a set of vetted material when they go into the communities to share information. After presenting information about the National Prevention Strategy (using one of those pre-developed documents), the officers then moved onto science experiments that linked public health and thinking like a scientist through hands-on activities. One of the camp's favorite experiments was called “Making Water Rise,” which called for supplies: a drinking glass, match, penny, food coloring, plate, and water. Without describing in full detail, as the flame heats the inside of the glass (which turned over on the plate), hot air expands quickly and escapes as it cools, the cooler air contracts. This creates a weak vacuum, causing the water on the plate to be sucked up into the drinking glass until the pressure inside and outside the glass has been equalized. The water, in this case, was dyed red so the children could see the phenomenon more easily. Underscoring how engaged the camp was in this experiment, we had a discussion about natural disasters (tornadoes in particular) and the interplay of high and low pressure systems. Needless to say we were asked to repeat the experiment!



LCDR Israel Cross (far left) and LCDR Shondelle-Wilson Frederick (second from left) using a hands-on approach to inspire learning with Camp Rehoboth children.

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*(PACE and SciPAC at Camp Rehoboth, continued from page 20)*

Although there were many other experiments, two of them were unsuccessful. Rather than proceeding to the next experiment as if nothing went wrong, the officers guided the kids through a troubleshooting exercise on why the experiment did not produce the intended results. It was important to use this “failure” to demonstrate that both successes and disappointments are learning opportunities and a part of science.

Using household products for a great majority of the experiments, the camp children were empowered to go home and extend their knowledge. This is what PACE is all about—targeting our young students with health education and interventions and investing in the health of our nation early on in the life course. As an added value, officers increase the visibility of the Corps and gain valuable leadership experience.

***By LCDR Israel Cross and LCDR Shondelle Wilson-Frederick***



LCDR Israel Cross (top left) and LCDR Shondelle Wilson-Frederick (top right) pictured with children and staff at Camp Rehoboth.

# RDF-3 is Honored with the 2017 AMSUS Humanitarian Award



Rapid Deployment Force 3 (RDF-3) was selected to receive the 2017 Association of Military Surgeons of the United States (AMSUS) Humanitarian Award for its efforts in supporting the first shared United States Public Health Service (USPHS) / Remote Area Medical (RAM) event. Nine Scientist Officers were among the 115 Commissioned Corps officers who participated in providing care to patients who arrived from eight different states. The AMSUS Society of Federal Health Professionals honors the contributions of outstanding federal healthcare professionals each year through the Awards Program, and the Humanitarian Award recognizes a team or individual that has made meritorious, direct, out-of-the-ordinary participation in a significant act or operation of a humanitarian nature.

Scientist Officers who supported the RAM mission pose for a picture with then-Acting SG RADM Sylvia Trent-Adams and RADM Joan Hunter (front row). Middle row, left to right: LCDR Zewditu Demissie, LCDR Folasade Kembi, LT Tanesha Tutt, LCDR Luz Rivera. Back row, left to right: LCDR Marcienne Wright, LCDR Eduardo O'Neill, LCDR Tyann Blessington, LCDR Neil Bonzagni, LCDR Jason Wilken.

resources and information and provide direct patient care. RAM seeks to provide free vision, dental, and medical care to individuals who cannot afford or who have limited access to health care. The first shared USPHS / RAM mission under this MOU occurred on June 3-4, 2017, at Red Bank High School in Chattanooga, TN. The RDF-3 Team participating in the mission was augmented by other teams, including Service Access Team 2

*(Continued on page 23)*

*(2017 AMSUS Humanitarian Award, continued from page 22)*

(SAT 2) and Mental Health Team members.

Over the two-day mission, PHS officers provided free care to 641 patients which included: dental cleanings, fillings, and extractions; eye exams, prescriptions, and made-on-site eyeglasses; women's health exams; diabetic screening and education; HIV/AIDS testing; Hepatitis C testing; and general medical exams. The RAM event resulted in more than \$275,000 worth of free services provided to single mothers, low-income couples, veterans, children and families, elderly, disabled, or any individual that wanted these services.

**By LT Tanesha G. Tutt**



*(Junior Officer Spotlight, continued from page 5)*

laboratively with the Environmental Protection Agency and FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine.

LCDR Ou decided to take the bull by its horns to overcome the challenges of being the sole USPHS officer in a remote area in Athens, Georgia by staying involved and active in USPHS activities. Since joining, he has stayed highly involved in both SciPAC and the Asian Pacific American Officers Committee (APAOC). In SciPAC, he has served with the Career Development Subcommittee, Category Day Subcommittee, Policy Subcommittee, Mentoring Subcommittee, and currently chairs the Website Subcommittee. He has been a voting member of APAOC since commissioning, and is currently serving his second term on the executive committee. In his position as the vice chair of Minority Office Liaison Council (MOLC), LCDR Ou led the planning of the 27th MOLC Awards Ceremony

in Chattanooga, TN with RADM Trent-Adams as the chief guest. He has also organized events in the Athens region such as "everybody walks" and recruits for USPHS at the local universities.

LCDR Ou indicates that as a foreign student from China, he had very few family and friends in the United States. Because of this, he considers USPHS as his extended family and makes a family event out of all Corps activities. In his spare time, he enjoys playing tennis, basketball, and ultimate Frisbee and attending COA events with his wife. The adventurous side of LCDR Ou is evident in his daringness to take Space-A travel, twice! Whatever time left after his busy schedule, he dedicates to volunteering for the "Brush with Kindness" project for *Habitat* for Humanity. This is a junior officer who truly serves as a role model for all of us to follow!

**By LCDR Shiny Mathew**

# 2017 American Public Health Association (APHA) Annual Meeting



Above: CDRs David Huang and Tim Cunningham at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health Alumni Reception at APHA. Fun fact: CDR Cunningham was CDR Huang's teaching assistant for a social epidemiology class at Harvard in the fall of 2007.

Right: LT Patrick High delivers his oral presentation, "Social and Community Indicators Concomitant with Behavioral Health: A Geospatial Representation of Counties within the 48 Contiguous United States."

The American Public Health Association (APHA) Annual Meeting is the oldest and largest gathering of public health professionals in the world. This year's meeting, the 145<sup>th</sup> such meeting, was held in Atlanta, what many would call the public health capital of the world, from November 4–8, 2017. With an attendance of roughly 12,500, it's easy to get lost in such a large meeting, but several Scientist Officers found time to connect at the conference. Furthermore, 6 Scientist Officers gave a total of 11 presentations at the meeting. See you next year at the 146<sup>th</sup> APHA Annual Meeting in San Diego!

*By CDR David Huang*



Above: CDR Tim Cunningham runs into a familiar face at APHA: Surgeon General Jerome Adams.

Join us for the 2018 USPHS Scientific & Training Symposium

June 4–7, 2018

InterContinental Dallas.

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