

**PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE OPTOMETRY OFFICER PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY GROUP 1
(OPAG)**

Teleconference Report – 11:03am to 12:55pm, Wednesday March 02, 2005

1. Attendees:

1.1. OPAG Members

- 1.1.1. CAPT Greg Ketcher (Chair)
- 1.1.2. CAPT Frank Behan
- 1.1.3. CDR Carmen Palma (Vice-Chair)
- 1.1.4. CDR Mike Candreva
- 1.1.5. CDR Nancy Nichols (HSO PAC member and ex officio OPAG member)
- 1.1.6. LCDR Kim Lewandowski-Walker (OPAG secretary)
- 1.1.7. LCDR Barbara Massey

1.2. Guests

- 1.2.1. CAPT Richard Hatch (Chief Clinical Consultant for Optometry)
- 1.2.2. CDR Keith Cespon (AFOS Liaison)
- 1.2.3. Dr. Tracy Crane (I.H.S. Civil Service Optometry Liaison)

2. Meeting called to order at 11:03am

- 2.1.1. Approval of minutes from February 02, 2005 OPAG meeting performed via e-mail to OPAG members

3. Guest Reports

3.1. Civil Service Reclassification – Title 38 – I.H.S. Special Pay Schedule

- 3.1.1. Dr. Tracy Crane gave the following report:

- 3.1.1.1. The I.H.S. optometry special pay scale for civil service optometrists has been submitted to I.H.S. headquarters, but it is on-hold due to staffing shortages at I.H.S. Headquarters. No concrete timeline for resolution.

- 3.1.1.2. Reclassification of optometry positions from GS-11 to GS-12– also at I.H.S. Headquarters and on-hold. No concrete timeline for resolution.

- 3.1.1.3. Title 38 – also at I.H.S. Headquarters and on-hold. No concrete timeline for resolution.

- 3.1.1.4. LCDR Massey suggested that OPAG write a letter to I.H.S. Headquarters to show our support for these issues. CAPT Hatch stated that he would speak to the Area Directors, Clinical Directors, Chief Medical Officers, and Council of Area Directors to attempt to garner support for these issues.

3.2. AFOS/SECO Meeting

- 3.2.1. CDR Keith Cespon gave the following report:

- 3.2.1.1. AOA wants unified membership with AFOS. This means that optometrists will not be allowed to joining AFOS without also becoming AOA members. Currently, AFOS is considered to be a “state” for representation in the AOA House of Delegates. The advantage to AFOS members joining AOA and declaring AFOS as their primary state is that it would strengthen AFOS in the AOA House of Delegates when issues

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come to a vote. No concrete resolution to this issue, but a Memorandum of Understanding may be drawn between AFOS and AOA.

3.2.1.1.1. If AFOS members pay 25% of their AOA dues by May, it also strengthens AFOS's position in the AOA House of Delegates.

3.2.1.1.2. The VA is increasing funding for low vision.

3.2.1.1.3. Currently there are 5 PHS optometry students receiving scholarships through IHS. Below is the IHS scholarship program website:

http://www.ihs.gov/JobCareerDevelop/DHPS/Scholarships/Scholarship_index.asp

3.2.1.1.4. Recruitment booth at SECO

3.2.1.1.4.1. SECO has been providing the booth space at no charge (still some charge for furniture rental).

3.2.1.1.4.2. SECO tends to be a more expensive meeting for I.H.S. optometrists to attend due to hotel and flight costs. This year the recruitment booth was fairly busy.

3.2.1.1.4.3. The Washington office Director of the AOA stopped by.

3.2.1.1.4.4. Other military recruitment booths were also at SECO. Other services are also going through a "transformation", including the possibility of base closures, increased emphasis on deployment and mobility, pressure to get optometrists in administrative positions back into clinical positions, and conversion of some officer positions to civil service positions. Junior officers of other services were appeared to be most interested in transferring to PHS, but are concerned with the PHS transformation. Overall, the PHS transformation has been an impediment to recruitment of officers to PHS from other branches of the military.

3.2.1.1.4.5. There was some interest in civil service optometry, locums, and volunteers, as well as optician positions within I.H.S.

3.2.1.1.5 All AOA and AFOS members were encouraged by the AOA liaison to join the AOA's "Infant See" program, where optometrists give a free eye examination to an infant. Federal service optometrists can promote this program among covered beneficiaries, but should only perform examinations on covered beneficiaries due to liability and programmatic issues. Signing up for this program would boost the number of federal service optometrists enrolled in this program, but there is concern that if the names of participating "Infant See" O.D.s are listed on a website that it is clear that federal service O.D.s can only see covered beneficiaries.

3.2.1.1.6 The new AFOS President is Colonel Francis McVeigh, US Army. The slogan is "One Mission, One Team".

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- 3.2.1.7** AFOS has a liaison for optometry students, Dr. Kyle Dom. Dr. Dom would like all optometry extern locations to have a web site where students could research and/or contact the extern site on-line.
- 3.2.1.8** Tri-Service concept – there was some discussion of the military moving towards a tri-service concept for deployments. Military members would be deployed as part of a tri-service medical corps.
- 3.2.1.9** The civil service reclassification of optometry positions may have importance for the military if optometry officer positions are converted to civil service.
- 3.2.1.10** The FSO meeting in November may address the rescinding of VA optometrist's laser privileges, but the policy rescinding those privileges is in effect until 2009.
- 3.2.1.11** VA student rotation update - The VA wants schools of optometry to guarantee placement of externs. This could potentially result in fewer externs available for I.H.S. rotations. Some optometry schools cut their enrollment by 40%, leading to a lack of interns for VA rotations. The VA is the only service pushing for guaranteed extern slot placement. No final outcome at the present time.
- 3.2.1.12** There are possibly 3 new optometry schools that may be starting.
- 3.2.1.13** Reduction in Air Force Retention Bonus – nothing to report. Retention bonus is based on a need to fill positions – if a service is overstaffed, is there a need for a retention bonus?
- 3.2.1.14** Position Papers – CDR Cespon suggested that OPAG and I.H.S./PHS optometry develop position papers on topics of importance. These position papers would state the history of an issue and I.H.S./PHS optometry's position on the issue.
- 3.2.1.15** Licensure by reciprocity was discussed. The Council on Licensure Endorsement Mobility for Optometry is a voluntary Association for state boards of optometry. The cost is \$250 per member, but it is still voluntary of behalf

3.3. HSO PAC Report

3.3.1. CDR Nichols gave the following report:

- 3.3.1.1.** The HSO PAC meeting on February 04, 2005 was approximately 6 hours in duration. The minutes for that meeting are not yet posted.
- 3.3.1.2.** The 6th Promotion Precept is still in a state of flux. The Chief Professional Officers had a meeting and most were against the 6th precept. No resolution to this issue.

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3.3.1.3. All those officers chosen to deploy to the tsunami had completed all the modules and had a passport. For deployment outside the U.S., officers must have a passport. Officers can apply for a passport at some post offices. You need a copy of your state-issued birth certificate (not the hospital issued one), two passport photos, a photo I.D., and married women need a copy of their marriage license if there was a name change. Visit <http://www.state.gov/travel/> for more information and download of a passport application.

3.3.1.4. Commissioned Corps is moving towards a more automated leave system in the future. See the February 2005 Commissioned Corps Bulletin for more information: http://dcp.psc.gov/PDF_docs/Feb05ccb.pdf

3.3.1.5. Discussion of the warrant officer program and possible incorporation of warrant officers into the Commissioned Corps at some point. Opticians do not appear to be in those professions considered for warrant officer. No resolution as of yet. Warrant officer program is not in effect as of yet.

4. Old Business

4.1. Retention pay (ORSP)

4.1.1. Issue regarding prohibition of receiving ORSP while on loan repayment. Optometry is currently the only discipline that cannot receive retention pay concurrently with a loan repayment obligation. Issue on hold until summer 2005.

4.2. Staffing/Recruitment CD-ROM

4.2.1. LCDR Barbara Massey is working on this issue. LCDR Massey is currently trying to collect information on the recruitment brochures and items already available for I.H.S./PHS optometry. LCDR Massey and CAPT Hatch will look into some possible funding from the I.H.S. media production services.

4.3. Medical Benefits – Care at I.H.S. Facilities update

4.3.1. The I.H.S. manual states that commissioned officers and their dependents may receive care at I.H.S. facilities. This is apparently due to the inability of I.H.S. to bill Tricare. No resolution to this issue as of yet. Officers and dependents should check with their Service Unit prior to receiving care to avoid unexpected medical bills for care received at I.H.S. facilities. Officers should not be receiving bills for care. If you receive a bill or are denied care, contact your Regional Commissioned Corps Liaison.

4.3.2. Officers wishing to keep abreast of Tricare news can obtain news and information at <http://www.tricare.org>

4.4. Transformation – nothing new to report

4.5. Uniform Policies – nothing new to report

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5. New Business

5.1. Selection of CCRF/ORFD Liaison for OPAG

5.1.1. After much discussion and thoughtful consideration, CDR Lawrence Zobel was selected as the CCRF/ORFD Liaison for OPAG. This was a difficult decision due to the highly qualified candidates that were nominated.

5.2 JOAG Liaison for OPAG

5.2.1 OPAG is soliciting nominations for JOAG Liaison to OPAG. This liaison position entails calling in to the JOAG meetings and reporting important information to OPAG. This liaison position does not mean that the selected officer will automatically be a voting member of JOAG. CAPT Ketcher will be sending out an announcement with more details.

5.2.2 JOAG conducts monthly teleconferences on the second Friday of each month from 1300 to 1500 EST. All O4 and below officers are encouraged to participate. To participate in the teleconference use the following dial-up and access code information: CALL-IN NUMBER: 888-807-8641 PASSCODE: 11247 More information can be found on the JOAG website:
<http://www.joag.org/>

5.3. COA Liaison for OPAG

5.3.1 OPAG is soliciting nominations for COA Liaison to OPAG. This liaison position entails reporting important COA information to OPAG. CAPT Ketcher will be sending out an announcement with more details.

5.4 Career Development/Promotions/Awards

5.4.1 Optometry Positions Outside I.H.S.

5.4.1.1 Discussion regarding matching optometry officers with positions outside of I.H.S. This issue may become important in the future as more I.H.S. facilities use direct-hire because the numbers of commissioned corps optometrists could decline over time.

5.4.1.2 There is currently one civil service optometrist at CDC, one commissioned officer optometrist at Office of Commissioned Corps Operations, and four commissioned officer optometrists at FDA. The impending retirement of CAPT Behan will leave no commissioned officer optometrist at OCCO.

5.4.1.3 Current position openings in the Federal Government can be obtained at <http://www.usajobs.opm.gov> and via the OCCO website under the Commissioned Corps Job Vacancy database link.

USPHS website Other Federal Jobs page

http://www.usphs.gov/html/other_federal_jobs.html

CCMIS web site mailing list for Commissioned Corps Vacancies
http://dcp.psc.gov/v_maillist.asp

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5.4.2 Awards

5.4.2.1 CAPT Richard Hatch was awarded the I.H.S. Medical Provider of the Year Award. The award was presented by Dr. Peter and Dr. Grimm on behalf of the National Council of Clinical Directors. **Congratulations to CAPT Hatch!**

5.4.2.2 Nominations are being solicited for the following awards:

5.4.2.2.1 American Indian/Alaska Native Commissioned Officer of the Year Award

5.4.2.2.2 Asian American Commissioned Officer of the Year Award

5.4.2.2.3 Stanley J. Kissel Award for Outstanding Health Services Professional of the Year

5.4.2.2.4 Joseph Garcia Jr. Award for Outstanding Junior Health Services Professional of the Year.

5.4.2.2.5 Please contact CDR Palma with ideas for nominees

5.5 CCRF/ORFD

5.5.1 All officers that were deployed to the tsunami completed all training modules and had a passport. See section 3.3 (HSO PAC Report), line 3.3.1.3 of these minutes for instructions on how to obtain a passport.

5.6 Communications

5.6.1 The Optometry Web Board has been developed. The address is <http://www.forum.ihs.gov/~optometry>. This Web Board will be used to post announcements regarding I.H.S./P.H.S. optometry.

5.6.2 There was some discussion as to the use of this web board. To date, only about 26 optometrists had signed up with the web board. Some find the web board confusing. We will monitor usage of the web board. For the time being, time sensitive information will still be sent out via email as well as posted on the web board. Other information will be posted on the web board only.

5.6.3 CAPT Hatch suggested that a page could also be developed on the I.H.S web site under the Chief Consultant page or the Optometry home page.

5.7 Presentations

5.7.1 A poster presentation on diabetic retinopathy was developed by CDRs Palma, Clary, Kelly, and Nord. This poster will be presented at the COA meeting.

5.8 OPAG Bylaws

5.8.1 Issues discussed included:

5.8.1.1 Rotation of appointment of members within agencies

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5.8.1.1.1 Currently a two year appointment

5.8.1.2 Staggered terms of appointment

5.8.1.3 Attendance requirements

6. Meetings and Recruitment Activities

6.1.1. SECO/AFOS - 02/23 – 02/27/2005. CDR Keith Cespon gave a report. See section 3.2 of these minutes for a summary report.

6.1.2. I.H.S. Flagstaff Meeting – 04/13 – 04/14/2005. For doctors and health technicians planning on attending the Navajo Area 2005 Optometry Continuing Education Conference - please register for the conference by emailing Susan Atkinson, Director of Continuing Education at Southern California College of Optometry. Her email address is satkinson@scco.edu. If you are a doctor needing continuing education credit you must provide Ms. Atkinson your name as it appears on your license, your address, state of licensure, and license number. Please register by March 1.

The meeting is at the Flagstaff Radisson Woodlands hotel, (928) 773-8888. Be sure to tell the Radisson you are part of this conference. Book your room as soon as possible to be assured the government rate. To learn more about the hotel visit their website at <http://www.radisson.com/flagstaffaz/>

6.1.3. COA – 06/06 – 06/10/2005 – CDR Palma is planning to attend and will give her report at the July OPAG meeting.

6.1.4. AOA Convention – 06/22 – 06/25/2005. Tentative attendees include CAPT Ketcher, CDR Keith Cespon, and Dr. William Pierre. Funding has been made available for a recruitment booth. CDR Cespon will be invited to the July OPAG meeting to give a report.

6.1.5. AMSUS – 10/30 – 11/04/2005 – Nashville, TN. CAPT Clifford Brown is planning to attend. There may not be any optometry CE offered at AMSUS in 2005, although no firm decision has been made. CAPT Brown will be invited to the December OPAG meeting to give a report.

6.1.6. IHS Eye Care Biennial 2006 Meeting – The next meeting is scheduled May 8-12, 2006 at the Southern California College of Optometry Fullerton campus. CAPT John Garber will again organize and conduct the continuing education program. The meeting is open to all I.H.S and PHS optometrists.

6.1.7. FSO – PHS may be requested to sponsor the FSO meeting in 2009. CDR Candreva will be attending the FSO meeting in November 7-10, 2005. The meeting hotel is the Shades of Green hotel in Orlando.

7. Action Items

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- 7.1. OPAG members will review the OPAG Bylaws for further review.
- 7.2. OPAG members will consider which item is most pressing for the development of a position paper.

8. OPAG Meetings

8.1 Next meeting scheduled for April 06, 2005 at 11:00 CST.

- 8.1.1 CAPT Richard Hatch will be invited as a guest at the next meeting.
- 8.1.2 OPAG members should use the same conference call number and password
- 8.1.3 Meeting adjourned at 12:55 pm

Minutes prepared by LCDR Kimberly Lewandowski-Walker, FDA Representative to the OPAG
Distribution: HSO CPO, HSO PAC, PHS Optometry Officers.