

**PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE OPTOMETRY OFFICER PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY GROUP <sup>1</sup>  
(OPAG)**

**Teleconference Report – 11:07am to 12:20pm, Wednesday May 04, 2005**

**1. Attendees:**

**1.1. OPAG Members**

- 1.1.1. CAPT Greg Ketcher (Chair)
- 1.1.2. CAPT Frank Behan (Absent)
- 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 - Absent)
- 1.1.6. LCDR Kim Lewandowski-Walker (OPAG secretary)
- 1.1.7. LCDR Barbara Massey

**1.2. Guests**

- 1.2.1. CAPT Richard Hatch (I.H.S. Eye Care Coordination Committee Chair)
- 1.2.2. CAPT Terry Schleisman (I.H.S. Clinical Training Coordinator and I.H.S. Chief Clinical Consultant for Optometry)

**2. Meeting called to order at 11:07am**

- 2.1.1. Approval of minutes from April 06, 2005 OPAG meeting performed via e-mail to OPAG members

**3. Old Business**

**3.1. Retention pay (ORSP)/Loan Repayment**

- 3.1.1. 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. No change in status as of now.
- 3.1.2. The dental category may soon be affected by this decision as well in terms of dental officers may not be able to receive the accession bonus concurrent with loan repayment. CAPT Schleisman stated the dental category is concerned about this issue and may help our cause.
- 3.1.3. This is likely to eventually affect all categories.
- 3.1.4. CAPT Schleisman stated that I.H.S. Optometry Program is preparing a survey, which has the potential to help allocate dollars for the I.H.S. LRP. CAPT Schleisman met with Ms. Jackie Santiago at I.H.S. Loan Repayment. Ms. Santiago stated that the LRP program may be receiving additional money this year, which may result in some additional loan repayment contracts for optometry this year.
- 3.1.5. FDA Loan Repayment Program
  - 3.1.5.1. While not as generous as I.H.S.'s LRP program, many do not know that FDA also has a loan repayment program
  - 3.1.5.2. Maximum amount payable is \$6,000 per employee per calendar year with a maximum of \$40,000 during the employee's HHS career.

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- 3.1.5.3.** Payments may be applied only to the indebtedness outstanding at the time FDA and the employee enter into an agreement.
- 3.1.5.4.** Prohibition against receiving ORSP and an FDA loan repayment agreement would still apply.
- 3.1.5.5.** Payments will be made directly to the lending institution holding the loan on behalf of the employee.
- 3.1.5.6.** Payments may not begin before an employee enters on duty.
- 3.1.5.7.** Student loan repayment benefits are in addition to basic pay.
- 3.1.5.8.** Tax withholdings will be deducted at the time payment is made and are subject to Federal income tax, FICA and Medicare withholding, and any applicable State or local income tax.
- 3.1.5.9.** More than one loan may be repaid as long as the total loan repayments do not exceed \$6,000 per year nor \$40,000 during the employee's HHS career.
- 3.1.5.10.** Before any loan repayment may be made, an employee must sign a service agreement. Minimum period of employment under the service agreement is 3 years, regardless of the amount of student loan repayment benefit authorized.

**3.2. Medical Benefits**

- 3.2.1.** United Concordia is now administering the dental benefits for PHS officers, including processing of all PHS dental claims and pre-treatment determinations.

**3.3. Transformation** – nothing new to report.

**3.4. Uniform Policies** – nothing new to report.

**3.5. OPAG Position Papers** – currently on hold.

**3.6. Selection of JOAG and COA Liaisons for OPAG** – currently on hold until after the voting members for these organizations have been elected or chosen by the organization (JOAG and COA).

**3.6.1. JOAG Liaison Self-Nominees**

- 3.6.1.1.** LCDR Nima Feldman
- 3.6.1.2.** LCDR Gregory Flaitz
- 3.6.1.3.** LCDR Crista Corbett
- 3.6.1.4.** LT Cameron Scott
- 3.6.1.5.** LT Brian Bucca

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**3.6.2 COA Liaison Self-Nominees**

**3.6.2.1** CDR Gay Nord

**3.6.2.2** LT Cameron Scott

**3.7. Title 38 – Civil Service Reclassification**

**3.7.1.** Nothing new to report. The issue appears to be languishing at Headquarters.

**3.7.2.** There are currently 17 civil service optometrists within I.H.S.

**3.7.3.** Over the past year, three civil service optometrists have left I.H.S., including the recent departure of Dr. Golde in Parker, AZ.

**3.7.4.** CAPT Hatch, CAPT Schleisman, and CAPT Ketcher will continue to work on this issue.

**3.7.5.** Optometry's low vacancy rate (currently about 11%) is likely hurting our efforts to re-classify these positions, in addition to increases in the number of civil service optometrists despite pay disparities. The Service Unit Chiefs may need to get involved to make this issue a reality.

**3.7.6.** LCDR Massey will contact Dr. Crane to see if the civil service O.D.s are willing to draft a letter to I.H.S. Headquarters regarding this issue. OPAG suggests the CS optometrists research the civil service turn over rates and other statistics which may bolster support of our efforts. We are currently seeing no action by headquarters personnel, presumably because this issue is not a priority to them. Our requests may appear self-serving, so we need persons outside of optometry to request these pays based on inability to fill positions, high turnover, etc. OPAG suggests the CS optometrists talk with CDs/DONs/SUDs/FUDs/CEOs at sites with longstanding unfilled optometry positions to request letters, phone calls, or other support from the CEO to IHS headquarters.

**4. New Business**

**4.1 OPAG Bylaws Update**

**4.1.1.** The following issues in the OPAG Bylaws were amended by OPAG

**4.1.1.1.** Attendance Requirements – members must attend at least 2/3 of the meetings or may be replaced.

**4.1.1.2** Bylaws amended to show that OPAG will represent all PHS optometrists, including civil service, tribal, and contract O.D.s

**4.1.2.** Changes approved by all present and will be sent to the HSO-PAC for re-endorsement.

**4.2** CAPT Ketcher made a motion to have OPAG meetings every other month, instead of every month (with option to have interim meetings as needed)

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**4.2.1** All present were in favor.

**4.3** Dr. Michael Duenas has been identified as a civil service optometrist working at CDC

**4.3.1** Dr. Duenas accepted CAPT Ketcher's invitation to join the OPAG as the CDC representative.

**5. Career Development/Promotions/Awards**

**5.1 Promotions**

**5.1.1** For commissioned officers to be promoted in the 2005 cycle, officers must meet and maintain basic readiness. This applies for permanent and temporary promotions.

**5.1.2** A clarification in the readiness policy has been made. Officers not meeting basic readiness by May 01, 2005 will be removed from the promotion list, but not meeting basic readiness will not constitute a non-recommendation.

**5.1.3** Readiness remains a "condition of service"; therefore, all officers regardless of promotion eligibility should meet and maintain basic readiness.

**5.2 Awards**

**5.2.1** CDR Palma has nominated one optometrist for the Stanley J. Kissel Award for Outstanding Health Services Professional of the Year.

**5.2.2.** CDR Palma has nominated one optometrist for the American Public Health Association Vision Care Section award.

**5.2.3** CDR Palma is researching a PHS Plaque for special awards for non-I.H.S optometrists

**5.2.4** CDR Palma is researching a Unit Commendation for the officers involved the formation of the OPAG

**5.2.5** OPAG wishes to encourage commissioned officers to nominate fellow officers and their subordinates for PHS Commissioned Officer Awards. Please recognize the accomplishments of your fellow officers.

**5.2.6** Contact CDR Palma for assistance in nominating your fellow officers for PHS Awards.

**5.2.7** OPAG encourages all optometrists to become involved in the local or Area awards committees.

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**5.3 Readiness Statistics** – CDR Zubel provided the following update via e-mail

**5.3.4** CDR Zubel currently has 65 names on his Basic-qualified (optometrists) list, but he is missing a few officers.

**5.3.5** CDR Zubel received word from OFRD that humanitarian-type missions are well within the scope of OFRD deployments, but we are cautioned that OFRD is not a staffing service, and deploying officers for such reason is unlikely. Deploying us to meet a crisis that the local staffing levels cannot meet--whether they're short or at full capacity--is fine. This is good news for those of us who are hungry to deploy, as it means that a disaster with mass eyeball casualties won't be required to mobilize us.

**5.3.6** If any officers have any secondary skills, such as certifications in EMT, pilot, SCUBA, nursing, pharmacy, etc., or expertise in a non-optometry field (such as environmental engineering, field hospitals, combat/trauma/mass casualty), inform CDR Zubel. He will make OFRD aware of the various capabilities of some of our officers, so that they might call upon us for those skills as well.

**5.3.7** CDR Zubel is in the process of coming up with a list of equipment that we probably ought to have ready to deploy somewhere, so it can be shipped at a moment's notice to wherever a deployment goes. He has heard from a few docs about what that pallet of gear ought to include, but would love to hear more input. Obviously, it will be somewhat mission-specific. In light of the fact that we might be deployed to fill humanitarian needs, equipment of a refractive nature would be appropriate, as well as the more obviously necessary emergency/injury type gear. Please send CDR Zubel input and ideas about what we should include, whether you have some extra gear that might be available for this, and whether you might be able to store this stockpile until it is needed to ship for deployment.

**5.3.8** CDR Zubel is anxious to hear from anyone who is having difficulties with becoming Basic-qualified, who is uncertain about any requirements or how to achieve them, or who has a problem with the whole notion. CDR Zubel volunteered to help with answers and explanations.

**5.3.9** Latest spreadsheet of readiness statistics

Optometry Officers Readiness Status as of 05/05/05

Rank	Agency			Total	Meet Basic	% Basic
	IHS	PSC	FDA		Readiness	Readiness
CAPT	28	1	3	32	25	78.13%
CDR	24			24	20	83.33%
LCDR	15		1	16	14	87.50%
LT	11			11	6	54.55%
Total	78	1	4	83	65	78.31%

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**5.4 Assimilation**

**5.4.1** CDR Candreva reported that those who applied for assimilation for January 2003 should receive a letter indicating the assimilation board decision.

**5.5 I.H.S. Scholarship Students**

Optometry	Bendure	Rodney	918-453-1370	1390 Heritage Lane, Apt.A11	Tahlequah	OK	74464	8/1/2005
Optometry	Shinn-Jones	Darcy M.	918-453-9212	404 Pat Street	Tahlequah	OK	74464	5/1/2005
Optometry	Sirmans Munson	Jayna	713-455-5516	799 Normandy #3306	Houston	TX	77015	5/1/2005

**5.5.1** CAPT Schleisman wishes to remind everyone that the I.H.S. scholarship program also pays for Junior Co-Steps and will fund civil service externships. These civil service externships can be as short as a couple of weeks to several months in duration.

**5.6 Positions**

**5.6.1** CAPT Brown is scheduled to transfer from Rapid City, SD to Crow Agency, Montana on June 01, 2005.

**5.6.2** The updated recruitment announcement reflects the Rapid City vacancy, and Crow Agency has been taken off of the list. The Recruitment Announcement can also be found on the IHS Optometry Website at [www.ihs.gov/MedicalPrograms/Optometry/Optjobs.cfm](http://www.ihs.gov/MedicalPrograms/Optometry/Optjobs.cfm).

**6.3 Communications**

**6.3.1** 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.

**7 Meetings, Recruitment Activities, and Liaison Reports**

**7.1 COA – 06/06 – 06/10/2005** – CDR Palma is planning to attend and will give her report at the June OPAG meeting. CDR Nichols would like to know of any commissioned officers planning to attend.

**7.2 BOTC – Gallup, NM on 06/21 – 06/23/2005.** See the Optometry web board for application info.

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

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- 7.4 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.
- 7.5 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.
- 7.6 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 Doubletree. <http://afos2020.org/Meetings/Fso/fso.htm>
- 7.7 JOAG–** JOAG Liaison to be determined. Liaison reports tentatively scheduled for October and April. JOAG website - <http://www.joag.org>.
- 7.8 Staffing and Recruitment –** LCDR Bellware to give a report, tentatively scheduled for November and February
- 8 Action Items**
- 8.1** CAPT Ketcher, CAPT Schleisman, and CAPT Hatch will continue to work on Title 38 Pay - Civil Service Reclassification by following up with Headquarters personnel on a periodic basis.
- 8.2** LCDR Massey will discuss with Tracy Crane a plan of action for CS employees to make contact with CEOs, etc to request support.
- 8.3** CAPT Ketcher will submit bylaw changes to HSO-PAC and CPO

**9 OPAG Meetings**

**9.1 Next meeting scheduled for June 29, 2005 at 11:00 CST.**

- 9.1.1** CAPT Richard Hatch will be invited as a guest at the next meeting.  
**9.1.2** CAPT Schleisman will be invited as a guest at the next meeting.  
**9.1.3** OPAG members should use the same conference call number and password  
**9.1.4** Meeting adjourned at 12:20 pm

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