

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

Conference Report – 11:00–, Wednesday September 13, 2006

1. Attendees:

1.1. OPAG Members

- 1.1.1. CAPT Greg Ketcher (Chair)
- 1.1.2. CDR Carmen Palma (Vice-Chair)
- 1.1.3. CDR Kim Lewandowski-Walker (OPAG secretary/treasurer - Absent)
- 1.1.4. CDR Barbara Massey
- 1.1.5. Dr. Michael Duenas (CDC Representative - Absent)

1.2. Invited Guests

- 1.2.1. CDR Mike Candrea – IHS Chief Clinical Consultant
- 1.2.2. CDR Nancy Nichols - HSO PAC member

2. Meeting called to order at 11:00 Central Time

- 2.1 Approval of minutes from May 09, 2006 OPAG meeting performed via e-mail to OPAG members

3. Old Business/ Standing Agenda Items

3.1. Retention pay (ORSP)/Loan Repayment

- 3.1.1. Should expect new contracts to be arriving in October.

3.2. Medical Benefits - nothing new to report. Tricare information is available on-line at www.tricare.osd.mil. TRICARE has many different e-newsletters you can subscribe to by visiting the website. The Fact Sheets subscription is useful to keep up with benefits changes.

3.3. Transformation

- 3.3.1. Transformation appears to be moving forward. CDR Nichols reported that the transformation workgroups were small and closed.

- 3.3.2. See section 4.5 of these minutes for additional transformation information.

3.4. Pay – Nothing new to report.

3.5. Uniform Policies

- 3.5.1. Nothing new to report

3.6. Retirements

- 3.6.1 CAPT John Garber, August 2006
- 3.6.2 CAPT James Hughes, August 2006
- 3.6.3 CAPT Dale Murray, September 2006

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3.7 Title 38 – Civil Service Reclassification – Pay Issues

3.7.1 Nothing new to report.

4 New Business and Liaison Reports

4.1 OPAG Membership

4.1.1 The terms of the current OPAG members expire November 1, 2006. A Call for Nominations was been sent for I.H.S. representation, including a civil service representative.

4.1.2 OPAG approved By law changes to allowing 3 appointments to be for 2 year terms and the remaining 2 would be 3 year terms. Thereafter, the terms would go back to 2 years on a staggered schedule.

4.1.3 Newly appointed OPAG will select a chair and vice chair during their first meeting.

4.1.4 To enable staggered terms and continuity, two incoming IHS members will serve 3 years. OPAG voted that the civil service member and the vice-chair should serve the three year terms with the hope that the vice chair would become chair for the final year of their term.

4.2 OFRD Report – CDR Larry Zubel

4.2.1 CDR Zubel sent a note to OFRD regarding the equipment we would like to have on deployment. The previous efforts were centered on justifying “clinical optometrist” as a valid and justifiable deployment role. That involved a lot of research, interviews, and input from other IHS and non-IHS OD’s. The initial focus wasn’t regarding the equipment needs we might have, thinking that we would bring our own.

4.2.2 CDR Zubel has been trying to reach Greg Davis to elaborate on the initial e-mail to him regarding equipment. He evidently wants additional info.

4.2.3 OFRD seems to recognize our value and validity as clinicians, and is interested in making sure we have the equipment we need to get our jobs done. We are not to travel with pharmaceuticals unless we are specifically told to do so! Handheld equipment is OK, but should become unnecessary shortly.

4.3 Eye Care Coordination Committee Report

4.3.1 Carmen Palma, Michael Candreva, Mark Horton, and James Cox are the current voting members. William Pierre is the tribal representative.

4.4 I.H.S. Optometry Clinical Consultant Report - CDR Michael Candreva

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- 4.4.1 Let's extend congratulations to CDR Dave Bellware, OD for his appointment as Bemidji Area Chief Clinical Consultant for Optometry. I am certain Dr. Bellware will have many successes in this leadership role.
- 4.4.2 Many thanks to CAPT Howard Heisler, OD for his years of commitment, service and dedication to IHS in his role as Bemidji Area Chief Clinical Consultant. It is to the benefit of all IHS Eye Care that CAPT Heisler will continue on as Chief of Optometry at Red Lake, MN.
- 4.4.3 For those of you who have not had a chance to attend a PMAP (Performance Management) training, CDR Candreva has a PowerPoint presentation relating to it and a link via the intranet.
<http://intranet.hhs.gov/pmap/>
- 4.4.4 CDR Candreva was forwarded a list of job listings for non-clinic/non-optometry positions in SAMHSA for O.D.s who may be looking for new non-clinical challenges.
 - 4.4.4.1 Contact CDR Candreva for more information

4.5 COA Liaison Report – CDR Dawn Clary

- 4.5.1 Transformation – COA continues to monitor “Three and Freeze” – COA continue monitoring with amendments via ADM John Agwunobi.
- 4.5.2 2006 COA Annual Meeting (June 5-11) in Denver, CO was fantastic. 1,258 attendees with 115 exhibitors. Turning the Annual COA meeting over to COF/conference funding.
- 4.5.3 New member recruitment program and long term member recognition – more information will be coming soon.
- 4.5.4 The COA/COF invitation for the reception in honor of, VADM Richard Carmona, 17th US Surgeon General and Mrs. Diane Carmona.
Tuesday, August 1, 2006. All officers are invited.
- 4.5.5 Next COA conference will be in Cincinnati, OH. (Rich Kennedy)
- 4.5.6 There will be more information/news regarding the COA after the “kick-off” workshop in September. I look forward to the next meeting in Oct. for a more comprehensive report.
- 4.5.7 New Strategic Plan for the COA/COF

4.6 HSO-PAC Liaison Report – CDR Nancy Nichols

- 4.6.1 CAPT Mike Milner replaces CAPT Linda Brown as new HSO CPO.
- 4.6.2 There were no optometry applicants for HS-PAC membership this year. The final list of new Pac members has not been announced yet.
- 4.6.3 HSO-Responder of the Year award will be announced soon.

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- 4.6.4** In regards to the 3 and freeze policy: bad news to be in the bottom 10% for 3 consecutive years b/c will be referred to a retention board
- 4.6.5** If don't meet basic readiness (without a waiver) the promotion board must remove the name and then name goes to a retention board. This year 8 HSO officers up for promotion did not meet basic requirement so their names were removed from the promotion list, with 5 of those being removed for not having an updated PPD documented (remember have to send info to MAB and update on the CCRF web page)
- 4.6.6** OCCO/OCCFM directors are cross training as was recently announced via listserv
- 4.6.7** There is hope to have corp. applications online by the end of the year
- 4.6.8** Government transformation funding looks promising – somewhere between 10-15 million, which will be used to fund many things such as 12 new OCCO/OCCFM positions and IT infrastructure
- 4.6.9** There is talk about the need to discuss officers' dual responsibilities (as an officer and "regular" job). Sounds like there will be workgroups formed to look at this issue
- 4.6.10** None of the CPOs knew until very recently that if an officer up for promotion was missing any COER, not just a recent one, that their name was taken off the promotion list. This is considered a communication problem b/c the CPOs think the written policy is vague and if the CPOs were not aware of the policy how would officers know?
- 4.6.11** Same effect for awards: if an award is submitted but the officer has a missing coer (any coer although not clear how far back) the award may be returned.
- 4.6.12** BOP revisiting their billets
- 4.6.13** Per OFRD, 74.9% of all officers meet basic readiness
- 4.6.14** For the recent promotion rounds, 41/43 submitted for EPP were promoted
- 4.6.15** New CPO wants to keep the needs of the officers in the field in mind

4.7 JOAG Liaison Report – LCDR Greg Flaitz

- 4.7.1** The Acting Surgeon General, RADM Kenneth P. Moritsugu, announces the selection of CAPT Dean Coppola to be the new JOAG Senior Advisor, effective September 15, 2006.
- 4.7.2** The new JOAG Executive Committee for 2006-2007! LT Aimee Treffiletti is the new Chair-Elect; LCDR Ernest Sullivent is the new Vice Chair; and LT Jennifer Freed is the new Executive Secretary. LT

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Heather Dimeris unfortunately resigned her nomination in the midst of the voting process. And of course, LCDR Thomas Pryor will be the JOAG Chair. Congratulations to all! JOAG is in great hands next year!!

- 4.7.3** Transformation Update - At the last SG-PAC meeting, RADM Knouss reported the following:
- 4.7.3.1** The agency heads still need to meet with Secretary Leavitt to discuss the Transformation Workgroup report, and they hope this meeting will take place some time in August. So far, there has been no nonconcurrence from any of the agencies with any of the workgroup recommendations.
 - 4.7.3.2** OPHS is currently reviewing candidates for the 12 positions related to Transformation (10 in OCCO and 2 in OCCFM), and hope to have some on board by September.
 - 4.7.3.3** They have outlined the next 2 years of activities related to policy development.
 - 4.7.3.4** The initial \$10 million earmarked for Corps Transformation by the House was upped a bit – the Senate recommended \$5 million extra, which is more than initially recommended.
 - 4.7.3.5** The automated Call to Active Duty system will hopefully be up and running by the end of the year.
 - 4.7.3.6** The Business Practice review, undertaken with the Lewin Group, should be complete within the next few weeks.
 - 4.7.3.7** They have cleared the first 10 Commissioned Officer profiles – developed in conjunction with ORC Macro - and hope to launch these profiles into local media sometime soon. This is part of the Corps' publicity campaign, which mimics the Hometown Heroes reports, where Commissioned Officer profiles are highlighted within their local communicates.
 - 4.7.3.8** OPHS hopes to begin targeted recruitment efforts some time in the winter months, after revisions to the Call to Active Duty system will provide the capacity to accept applications and assist folks with finding assignments.
 - 4.7.3.9** The Warrant Corps is still in development. They have been having discussions with the Nurse PAC, and RADM Romano has submitted an Option Paper to OSG.
- 4.7.4** **Readiness Update**
- 4.7.4.1** CDR Beck reported that 75% of the Corps currently meets readiness standards.

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- 4.7.4.2** All 5 RDF teams have completed a 2-day, basic training, and almost all of the IRCTs have completed training.
- 4.7.4.3** The RDF teams are 80% rostered - they still need to find the prescribed number of nurses. Six of the 10 IRCTs are fully staffed, while four in remote regions remain understaffed.
- 4.7.4.4** The Applied Public Health Teams are fully rostered, and the Mental Health Teams are 90% staffed.
- 4.7.4.5** There are also a number of flag officers rostered as Senior Health Officials, to provide senior leadership for ESF-8 in the PFO cell. Each will have an Executive Assistant. There are three in region IV, three in region VI, and three to cover the remaining eight regions.
- 4.7.4.6** OFRD has also established an Emergency Management Group, comprised of Tier 3 officers who will deploy to HHS. RADM Vanderwagen is the Incident Commander for this group.
- 4.7.4.7** Legislation is moving through the Senate and House to put into statute the Readiness policies which have been implemented this far. The White House and OMB have signed off on this.
- 4.7.4.8** OMB has transmitted a supplemental request to fund 2 HAMR Teams for the last half of FY-07.

4.8 AFOS Liaison Report – CDR Keith Cespon –

- 4.8.1** CDR Keith Cespon attended the American Optometric Association June Meeting in Las Vegas, NV for the dual role to attend the 109th AOA Annual Congress as an AFOS Delegate and set-up and conduct a recruitment booth at the exhibit hall for the AOA meeting.
 - 4.8.1.1** Recruitment booth received good interest, especially from optometry students and current optometry residents.
 - 4.8.1.2** Entering salary levels, GS classification/lack of equality to VA, and inability to guarantee loan repayment continue to hamper recruitment success for the 18 full time vacancies.
 - 4.8.1.3** Optometry and the National Health Service Corps (NHSC)
 - 4.8.1.3.1** NSHSC is a program of Department of Health and Human Services and is administered by the Bureau of Health Professionals. The HHSC assists the development, recruitment and retention of community-responsive clinicians dedicated to practicing in health professional shortage areas.

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- 4.8.1.3.2** To be eligible to participate in NHSC loan repayment programs, an individual must have a degree in a recognized profession, but priority for participation is limited to those professions that have been listed as providing "primary health services". Optometry is not among the health professions named in law as "primary"; however, the law authorizes other health care professions to be added to the NHSC at the discretion of the Secretary of the HHS.
- 4.8.1.3.3** Both the House and Senate HHS appropriations committees agree that optometrists should be added to the NHSCS.
- 4.8.1.3.4** As a result of the HRSA position, the AOA will pursue specific legislation enable optometry to participate in the HNSC programs.
- 4.8.2** All providers need to sign up for the Medicare National Provider Identification Number. It will be required for Medicare billing purposes in the future. You can sign up on line at: <https://nppes.cms.hhs.gov> You may also enter your current Medicare provider number and UPIN. Please contact your billing staff or CAPT Ketcher if you need assistance.
- 4.8.3** CAPT Brown reported that he is on the design workgroup for the AFOS PHS Commemorative Coin. The coin will be given to newly and previously promoted O-6 officers. The coin will feature the PHS logo on one side. CAPT Brown encourages officers with design ideas to contact him.
- 4.8.4** FSO meeting will be held October 30 to November 3, 2006 at the Hilton Springfield in Virginia (703-971-8900).

4.9 AMSUS Liaison Report – CAPT Clifford Brown

- 4.9.1** The 112th annual meeting of the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States (AMSUS) is being held at the River Walk in San Antonio, TX during November, the week of 05-10. This is, as you know, the international conference of military and uniformed services health care hosted annually by the United States. In the 2006 meeting the Veteran's Administration is in charge of the very timely (and what I expect to be a very well-orchestrated) program.

The theme of this year's meeting is "Health 2015: Actionable Strategies for Caring for Our Warriors, Veterans and Country." Session topics include public health issues and initiatives among the federal agencies, with emphasis on chemical, biological, and radiological surveillance. Published objectives for the conference are centered on:

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1. Identification of new technologically-based strategies for disease management, health promotion, and preventive / outreach care.
2. Utilization of health information to identify strategies that enhance patient access to care and improving patient care quality and safety.
3. Identification of new health support and administrative tools, techniques, and technology that enhance care delivery.

The two days of Optometry specific CME are COPE-approved. Other CME is available by means of ACCME and ACHE. Of particular note is the presentation on Monday afternoon by VADM Richard Carmona entitled “The Future of Health Care in the Public Health Service.” This could well be the last time we have a chance to hear from the man who has led the USPHS through so much change and into national prominence. All of the other Surgeons General will be presenting also, providing the audience a peek into the future direction of health care in the uniformed services.

4.10 PHS HSO PAC Recruitment and Placement Sub-Committee Liaison– CDR David Bellware

4.10.1 CDR Bellware is currently working with three active applicants.

4.10.1.1 One of them is in the process of applying to the IHS pending a release from the USARMY IRR.

4.10.1.2 One is trying to convert from CS to CC. This process has been put on hold for approximately one year secondary to inability to gain a release from the USARMY.

4.10.1.3 Another is an IHS Scholarship payback who took a CS job in the Albuquerque and recently converted to CC.

4.11 FDA Optometry Report – CDR Kimberly Lewandowski-Walker

4.11.1 The Food and Drug approved Lucentis (ranibizumab injection) for the treatment of patients with neovascular (wet) age-related macular degeneration (AMD). Lucentis is the first treatment which, when dosed monthly, can maintain the vision of more than 90 percent of patients with this type of AMD. Lucentis is a new molecular entity (NME), meaning it contains an active substance that has never before been approved for marketing in any form in the United States. Lucentis will be the first FDA-approved product to provide prescription information in the new format for prescription drug package inserts, to provide professionals and consumers clear and concise prescription information.

4.12 CDC Optometry Report – Dr. Michael Duenas – No report

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5. Career Development/Promotions/Awards

5.1 Billets – nothing to report

5.2 Promotions

5.2.1 Officers should carefully follow the procedures on the OCCO promotion webpage. http://dcp.psc.gov/prom_faq.asp

5.3 Awards

5.3.1 OPAG is accepting nominations for the following awards:

5.3.1.1 The Lester Caplan Award recognizes a PHS tribal direct hire or PHS civil service optometrist who has demonstrated exemplary work as evidenced by a specific accomplishment(s) toward the mission of the PHS:

5.3.1.2 The Edward Hamilton Award is presented to a career USPHS Optometry Commissioned Officer who is recognized by his/her peers for outstanding work as evidenced by a specific accomplishment(s) toward the mission of the PHS.

5.3.2 CDR Steve Goldwasser received the Arizona Rural Health Professional of the Year Award

5.3.2.1 Award was presented at the 33rd Annual Arizona Rural Health Conference, held in Bisbee July 19-21, 2006

5.3.2.2 Congratulations to CDR Goldwasser

5.3.3 CAPT Cliff Brown received the AMSUS Optometrist of the Year Award.

5.3.4 For Commissioned Officers, the order of precedence for the wearing of ribbons can be found at <http://coa.spsp.net/webpage/uniforms/ribbons.html>

5.3.5 OPAG feels that the IHS awards process is inequitable when compared to other agencies. Awards, or lack of, have a large affect on promotion scores.

5.4 Readiness/OFRD

5.4.1 Any officers not meeting readiness who require assistance should contact CDR Zobel.

5.4.2 See section 4.2 of these minutes for additional OFRD information.

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5.5 Assimilation

- 5.5.1** Applications for Assimilation year 2007 are available on the CCMIS website under official forms (PHS form 7034). Examples of officer statements can be obtained by contacting your agency liaison or by request to the assimilation coordinator, Camille.hawkins@hhs.gov.
- 5.5.2** If you applied for Assimilation in the spring of 2004, that Assimilation package was just confirmed by the Senate on March 13, 2006. OCCO is now making sure that all of those on the list are still eligible. They are in the process of doing “Administrative checks” which includes looking to see if the officers have any adverse actions, if they are Basic Ready, good COERs, a valid license, and if they have an SF-88 and SF-93 completed within five years and one year, respectively, of the President’s nomination per CCPM 29.3, Instruction #5:

5.6 Pay – Nothing to report

5.7 Positions

- 5.7.1** The most recent Recruitment Announcement can be found on the IHS Optometry Website at www.ihs.gov/MedicalPrograms/Optometry/Optjobs.cfm.

6 Communications

- 6.1** Optometrists should keep CDR Candreva informed of changes in email address.

7 Meetings and Recruitment Activities

- 7.1 AMSUS** – November 05-10, 2006 – San Antonio, TX.
- 7.2 AAO Annual Meeting** –. December 7-10, 2006 at the Colorado Convention Center, Denver, Colorado. Information can be found at www.aaopt.org
- 7.3 BOTC** – September 25-27, Rockville, MD and October 23-25, 2006, Rockville, MD
- 7.5 AFOS** – next meeting is October 30-November 03, 2006 at the Hilton in Alexandria, Virginia.
- 7.6 Navajo Area IHS Optometry CE Conference**, April 13 and 14, 2007, Flagstaff, Arizona, Flagstaff Medical Center, Magee Conference Center
- 7.6.1** 2007 Navajo Area--IHS Optometry Continuing Education Conference
15 hours of COPE approved continuing education
Co-sponsored by Southern California College of Optometry
- 7.6.2** Contact CAPT Richardson for more information

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7.7 COA –2007 USPHS Conference will be held in Cincinnati, Ohio during the first week of June.

7.8 AOA Convention - Next AOA – June 27-July 1, 2007, Boston, MA. Information is available at www.aoa.org

8 Action Items

8.1 CAPT Ketcher will follow up on OPAG By-laws approval by HSO-PAC.

9 OPAG Meetings

9.1 Next meeting scheduled for November, 1 2006 at 11am Central time.

9.2 Incoming OPAG members will be invited.

Minutes prepared by CDR Kimberly Lewandowski-Walker, FDA Representative to the OPAG

Distribution: HSO CPO, HSO PAC, PHS Optometrists