

A Message From the Chief Nurse

Nurses,

As summer ends and we usher in the autumn season, I want to share a few updates to keep you informed.

Our Acting Surgeon General Steven Galson has announced his retirement effective October 1, 2009. As we prepare to welcome a new Surgeon General, we can reflect with pride on the many accomplishments of RADM Galson. These include his Healthy Youth for a Healthy Future initiative to bring national attention to the complex issue of childhood obesity prevention, the published Surgeon General's Calls to Action on Deep Vein Thrombosis and Pulmonary Embolism and the Promotion of Healthy Homes, the promotion of state-wide policies to prevent underage drinking, and to rejuvenate the national dialogue on preventing pre-term births. His dedication to the Corps resulted in a workforce of over 6500 officers with a readiness level of 93%, the highest level of readiness of all the uniformed service branches. Join me in thanking RADM Galson for his leadership and support to nurses. We all wish him well in his continued professional journey.

We await confirmation of the new Surgeon General nominee, Dr. Regina Benjamin, in the near future.

Policy

All nurses and health care workers are strongly encouraged to receive early seasonal influenza vaccinations!

Officers are required to obtain and document the seasonal influenza immunization this year between 1 August and 31 December, 2009 to be in compliance with this annual readiness component. Remember to record the immunization information online using the OFRD website (<http://ccrf.hhs.gov/ccrf>) and send proof of the immunization to the Medical Affairs Branch (which can receive immunization information via fax at: 301.594.3299).

We do not have an officer readiness policy regarding the 2009 H1N1 influenza virus (formerly called "novel H1N1 flu" or "swine flu") immunization. It is unlikely that the 2009 H1N1 immunization will be a readiness requirement for 2009. However, we still encourage all commissioned officers (excepting those with medical contraindications) to receive the 2009 H1N1 immunization when it is available. Please note, the seasonal flu vaccine is not expected to protect against the 2009 H1N1 flu. Similarly, the 2009 H1N1 influenza vaccine will not protect against seasonal influenza. It is anticipated that seasonal flu and 2009 H1N1 vaccines may be administered on the same day but given at different sites (e.g. one shot in the left arm and the other shot in the right arm).

For more information about seasonal influenza immunization visit:
<http://www.flu.gov/seasonalflu/index.html>.

For information about the planned U.S. government H1N1 Immunization Campaign visit: <http://pandemicflu.gov/individualfamily/vaccination/index.html> and <http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/vaccination/>

Nurses are critical to protecting our nation and addressing prevention related to flu season and H1N1. Please remember to speak out in your community to stress the importance of influenza immunization.

Readiness

September is National Preparedness Month and time to assess your own readiness to respond to emergency situations. For nurse officers, your basic readiness status on Sept 30, 2009 is reported to HHS as one indicator to reflect the Commissioned Corps preparedness to protect the nation. We still need you to help us achieve 100% readiness!

Over 1,200 officers received OFRD deployment field training in five separate sessions between August 3 and September 11, 2009 at FT AP Hill. For the first time, this training included the integrated participation of active duty officers, inactive reservists and Medical Reserve Corps volunteers. It is expected that field training will continue in spring 2010. I strongly encourage you to make plans to attend one of these sessions next year. I applaud the staff in the Office of Force Readiness and Deployment and especially the nurse officer leadership from CDRs Kim Elenberg and Patrick Denis for their work in making this a success.

We continue with humanitarian missions in Ecuador, Nigeria and Liberia. Planning also continues in preparation for possible Corps participation in the H1N1 response.

Transformation

We are progressing with work on new nurse officer billets. A Billets Transformation Tutorial for Officers (video and text versions) is available and can be found at http://dcp.psc.gov/Billets_Tutorial.aspx

Also, FAQs for billets transformation have been updated and are posted here:

<http://www.usphs.gov/transformation/billet.aspx>

Our Commissioned Corps strength is over 6575 and the nurse strength is 1528 officers. This is over a 15 % increase in our category numbers since 2005. Keep up your recruiting efforts!

Career development

On Monday, November 30, 2009 at 1300-1430 eastern time, a Public Health Reports web cast brings together public health historians and practitioners to connect the U.S. experience of the 1918 flu pandemic to the ongoing practice issues facing influenza preparedness planning. Plan to attend this web cast entitled "Planning for a Pandemic – Can History Inform Action?" For more information visit www.publichealthreports.org/interactive/webcast.cfm

Please be advised that as federal workers and officers you are not covered under the Federal Tort Claims Act if you practice activities outside the scope of your daily work assignment; (e.g., giving community flu shots or health education for routine vaccination information). As a community volunteer you need to have an outside activity form approved by your agency and

also have individual malpractice insurance if you want liability coverage. Deployments through the Office of Force Readiness and Deployment are considered official duty with legal malpractice coverage.

As we draw close to the end of the year, I ask that you work to prepare for your annual performance evaluation, update your resumes and file, reflect on your accomplishments and begin to think of goals for next year. There is still time!

Leadership & Outreach

I had the opportunity to represent the Acting Surgeon General at the National Library of Medicine Board of Regent's meeting in September to share the activities of the Surgeon General's Office. Of note is our work with Microsoft Health Vault to facilitate use of the Surgeon General's family health history tool to collect family information to assess health risks. I encourage you to visit the Surgeon General's web site to look at this tool at www.surgeongeneral.gov/.

I also had the opportunity to speak with the graduating classes of the Officer Basic Courses in July and August. I am impressed with our new officers and their dedication to serve. Please reach out to assist new officers and nurses new to your organizations to help guide them in meeting our mission.

I am working closely with RADM Kerry Nessler to prepare for our Chief Nurse Officer change of command on November 1, 2009. We plan to have an event to acknowledge this on November 2, 2009 in Rockville, MD at the Parklawn Building. More information will be forthcoming.

Final Comment

We recently mourned the loss of a well known Senator and public servant. His words reminded me of the challenges that we as nurses confront and the reality that our "...work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still lives and the dreams shall never die [Ted Kennedy August, 1980]."

Hang onto your dream for a healthier nation and work to bring that to a reality....Hope always lives in the nurses who care for our people.

Thank you for your dedicated service to our nation!

Carol A. Romano PhD, RN, FAAN

Assistant Surgeon General

Chief Nurse Officer, USPHS

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