

A Message From the Chief Nurse

Nurses,

We now begin a new fiscal year and a new season of the year. Much has happened this month and these updates are intended to keep you informed.

First, I want to acknowledge how proud I am of the leadership and performance of the Nursing Professional Advisory Committee (NPAC) this past year. Special kudos to our Chair, CDR Katherine Berkhausen! Her leadership, integrity and excellence have been outstanding and we are all in debt to her for her personal commitment and sacrifice in working on behalf of all nurses. I welcome the new officers and look forward to CAPT Michelle Poindexter's leadership of the NPAC during FY-09.

This month the Surgeon General released his Call to Action (CTA) on Deep Vein Thrombosis and Pulmonary Embolism. These conditions claim over 100,000 lives each year. The CTA is posted on the www.surgeongeneral.gov web site. The journal Public Health Reports features a Surgeon General Perspective on Deep Vein Thrombosis in the September/October issue. We plan to post these perspectives on the web site in the near future.

Readiness

We celebrated September as National Preparedness Month, and the thrust of multiple hurricanes reinforced the need for all of us to be prepared. The Corps deployed over 1,000 officers in response to hurricanes Gustav, Hanna and Ike. Our lessons learned from Katrina positioned us to be more responsive and effective. In addition, over 34 Medical Reserve Corps units from nine different states also responded. We have improvements to make, but nurses distinguished themselves once again as heroes of health. Those who deployed and those civilian and Corps nurses who served in place made a significant difference in the lives of those struck by tragedy. I am so very proud to serve with each of you!

Our humanitarian training mission on the USS Kearsarge was suspended temporarily when the crew and USPHS officers were rerouted to Haiti to provide disaster relief in the wake of the hurricanes in the Gulf. The mission has resumed and is expect to end in December.

Please continue to check your readiness status. Those who were deployed were given a 30 day extension to complete readiness requirements. September 30 is the date that our readiness status is reported to the Secretary. The nurse category is still pushing for 100% compliance.

Reminder: An annual flu vaccine is due this fall and your results need to be updated in the immunization section of the OFRD website and also sent to Medical Affairs Branch.

Outreach & Leadership

We are working with the Commissioned Officers Foundation regarding expanding recognition for nurses. Donations to the foundation have been identified to continue to fund the Mabel May Wagner Nursing Award and create new monetary awards for nurse officers as well as civilian and tribal nurses. I will be working with the foundation and the NPAC leadership to increase opportunities for recognizing nurses.

I joined the other Federal Nursing Service Chiefs in meeting with the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs to share information about nurses in research and in humanitarian efforts. The need for a greater emphasis on psychological health and holistic care of patients and their families, and the importance of nursing research and evidence based practice in these areas was discussed. The partnerships we have with military health, public health, Veterans Affairs, the Red Cross and universities help us to share ideas and best practices and create healthy futures for us all. I encourage you all to seek opportunities to collaborate with your colleagues in these areas.

RADM Kerry Nessler and I met with the World Health Organization's University Collaborating Centers in the Americas. The need for international and global health to be incorporated into curriculums was discussed. We also shared information about opportunities in the Commissioned Corps for students who are U.S. citizens.

Career Development

Please note that the Commissioned Officer's Effectiveness Report (COER) for annual review of nurse officer performance is available on line. This will cover the rating period of 1 Oct 2007 through 30 Sept 2008. Please note the due dates because a missing COER for any year of service may negatively affect your eligibility for promotion, awards or special pays. All officers must access the secure area of the CCMIS to initiate the COER.

The COER is due to your supervisor (rater) by 15 Oct 2008.

The COER is due to your reviewer by 29 Oct 2008.

The COER is due to OCCO by 12 Nov 2008.

OCCO has posted the Notification of competitive promotion eligibility on the officer's main page in the Secure Area of the CCMIS website <http://dcp.psc.gov>. Prepare your file now by updating your resume and readiness. The 2009 benchmarks are available at <http://dcp.psc.gov/PY2009.aspx>. OCCO has developed an excellent promotion information webpage on the CCMIS. Click on 'Promotion Information' under services on the CCMIS for the most up-to-date regulations and forms.

We are happy to report that 15 junior PHS officers will be attending the CJ Reddy Leadership Training in October. This is an annual program sponsored by the Army Nurse Corps. We have been able to increase our attendance in this program from 2 to 15 over the past three years and are grateful to our army nurse colleagues for making this opportunity available. We will continue to call for nominations and supervisor approval each July. Congratulations to those selected to attend.

Leadership training and other career enhancement opportunities will be available at the annual AMSUS conference. Please plan to join the USPHS at this year's conference being held in San Antonio, TX from Nov 9-14, 2008. The US PHS has the honor of sponsoring the conference this year. For conference details and to register please visit www.amsus.org <<http://www.amsus.org/>>

Policy

Several new policies have been posted to the CCMIS web site <http://dcp.psc.gov>. A major change to note is the revision to the Wear of Ribbons and Medals issuance that now DOES NOT allow wearing of COA, AMSUS, ROA or other association ribbons with the routine daily wear of the uniform. These are allowed when attending meetings, conferences, and ceremonial or association events. (CC26.3.3 section 6-16). Other policies include PPM 08-019, Wear of Skill and Breast Badges, PPM 08-020, Phase Out of Uniforms, and uniform policies for male and female wear and for special situations.

Transformation

A pilot program for Assignment and Incentive Pay (CCI 631.02) has been established effective 8 September 2008 through December 2010, and offers recruitment and retention strategies for officers. Agencies have the option to initiate use of this tool within specific parameters for hazardous and hardship assignments. The program allows incentive pay on a monthly basis if you qualify and your agency is supportive. It also requires written agreements to be in place by December 31, 2008. Refer to the issuance at http://dcp.psc.gov/eccis/documents/cci6_3_1_02.pdf

A New Commissioned Corps Awareness for Supervisors (CAPS) program is in development. The first phase includes an on-line brochure for supervisors with frequently asked questions (FAQs) and is available now at <http://usphs.gov/Supervisor/>. The existing supervisor's manual will be updated next. Please share these resources with civilian and Corps supervisors to assist them with Corps Officer personnel practices.

A redesign of the COER is also planned and a prototype COER is being pilot tested for use in 2009.

The strength of the Corps has increased to 6205 officers and nurses continue to be the largest category at 1453. We all need to continue to recruit nurses. There are still over 800 nurse vacancies in the agencies we serve.

Comment

As we begin the new fiscal year we are reminded that many changes and transitions will confront us in the next year, namely an election, a new budget, a new administration, new transformation initiatives, new science, and new leadership.

It is hard to believe that I have completed almost three years in your service as Chief Nurse. My term of office will expire next year, October 31, 2009. It is now time to begin soliciting nominations for the next Chief Professional Officer (CPO) for Nursing. A call for nominations has gone out to agencies and the deadline for applying will be 14 November 2008. Look for a message on the list-serve. Six CPOs will "pass the baton" to their successors in 2009 (medical, engineer, nurse, environmental health, dietician, and scientist) and we want to have a smooth transition with early identification of successors. I expect to maintain my energy and enthusiasm for the office I hold and to continue to serve you while planning for your new leadership.

Take this opportunity to reflect on what you will do this new fiscal year, how you plan to grow and what you hope to achieve in this journey. Embrace the changes around you and be open to new opportunities. I look forward to our continued journey together as we work to create the future of health.

Carol A. Romano PhD, RN, FAAN

Assistant Surgeon General

Chief Nurse Officer, USPHS

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