

**Public Health Service Optometry Officer Professional Advisory Group
(OPAG)
Conference Report January 17, 2007**

1. Attendees

- 1.1 OPAG members:** Charles Jaworski, Gay Nord, Christian Thompson, Maricella Bonilla
- 1.2 Invited Guests:** Michael Candreva (IHS Optometry Chief Clinical Consultant), Nancy Nichols (HSO-PAC Liaison)
- 1.3 Absent:** Mike Duenas, Kimberly Lewandowski-Walker, Lawrence Zubel

2. Meeting called to order at 10:06 MST

- 2.1 Minutes:** accepted with one correction. Date of meeting was not November 15, 1968. Minutes will be corrected to reflect the correct date (November 15, 2006)
- 2.2 Agenda:** not available for review

3. Old Business/Standing Agenda Items

- 3.1 Retention Pay (ORSP)/Loan Repayment:** 6 new awards and 15 extensions granted in FY 2006. Three of the new awardees are awaiting payment, which should arrive within a few weeks. Expect new awards to increase as extensions fall in number. It takes on average 2 years after initial application to get loan repayment. See 4.4 for additional information.
- 3.2 Medical Benefits-Tricare:** no discussion
- 3.3 Transformation:** no discussion
- 3.4 Pay:** no discussion
- 3.5 Uniform Policies:** no discussion
- 3.6 Retirements:** no discussion
- 3.7 Civil Service Pay Issues/Title 38/Reclassification:** Dr. Thompson reports that Dr. Crane has been in touch with the classifying agent at Whiteriver who was able to post a GS-13 optometry position. GS-13 classification for OD's is apparently possible if the local and/or area classifier is willing to go into a gray area.

A discussion ensued about Title 38 and Special Salary Rates for Optometry, during which it became clear that the members present had no clear idea of the facts involved. Information will be sought (see Action Items)

4. New Business and Liaison Reports

- 4.1 OPAG Membership/Agenda/By-Laws:** no discussion
- 4.2 OFRD Report (CDR Zubel):** CAPT Jaworski highlighted a report he received by e-mail
 - 4.2.1** Officers must continue to remain up-to-date with basic readiness requirement
 - 4.2.2** Top reasons for falling out of compliance include missing fitness testing, PPD results, immunization documentation and BLS.
- 4.3 Eye Care Coordination Committee Report (CDR Candreva):** The notable topic for discussion at the last meeting was optometry privileges for laser use. Dr. Candreva gets questions about laser privileges from some potential hires

licensed in Oklahoma. The conclusion of this discussion was that at this time there are no PHS sites with lasers and without ophthalmologists, so no decisions need be made at this time.

4.4 IHS Optometry Chief Clinical Consultant Report (CDR Candreva):

- 4.4.1 The Continuing Resolution will likely last the entire fiscal year.
- 4.4.2 CDR Candreva will be meeting with CAPT Canton this week to discuss Optometry, Loan Repayment (LR) and Optometry Retention Special Pay (ORSP). Currently, Commissioned Corps Optometrists cannot receive ORSP and Loan Repayment simultaneously. When ORSP first became available to optometry officers, we were told that although officers in other specialties had in the past been getting both RSP and loan repayment simultaneously, they would soon lose that privilege. It has been at least 2 years now, and only optometry continues to be denied simultaneous RSP and LR.
- 4.4.3 Five students are attending optometry school on scholarship.
- 4.4.4 Six IHS optometry residencies are staffed this year.
- 4.4.5 122 students completed externships in FY 2006
- 4.4.6 CDR Candreva co-authored the article "Selecting a mode of practice: Public Health Service and community health centers" published in the Journal of the American Optometric Association, December 2006.
- 4.4.7 Headquarters is working on information sheets about optometry for recruiting purposes

4.5 COA Liaison Report (CDR Clary): no report

4.6 HOS-PAC Liaison Report (CDR Nichols): Highlights of a verbal report from CDR Nichols include:

- 4.6.1 The new HSO PAC chairperson, CAPT Candarelli, is requesting a member from each PAG to serve on a Career Development Subcommittee. LCDR Bonilla volunteered for this position.
- 4.6.2 The Transformation Implementation Plan is on the website.
- 4.6.3 CDR Nichols strongly encourages all to read the monthly e-bulletin.

4.7 JOAG Liaison Report (LCDR Flaitz): no report

4.8 AFOS Liaison Report (CDR Cespon): no report

4.9 AMSUS Liaison Report (CAPT Brown): no report

4.10 PHS HOS PAC Recruitment and Placement Subcommittee Liaison (CDR Bellware): no report

4.11 FDA Optometry Report (CDR Lewandowski-Walker): Highlights of report shared verbally

4.12by CAPT Jaworski

- 4.12.1 Officers up for promotion should complete eOPF updates as early as possible. Large numbers of faxes at the deadline overwhelmed the system and make error and incompleteness in one's eOPF more likely.

- 4.12.2 Tuberculosis testing requirements for OFRD have changed. Officers can find the new requirements of the OFRD website.
- 4.12.3 Officers need to be aware of 2 separate immunization reporting systems, one for OFRD and one for MAB
- 4.12.4 Check onlinecredits.com for a years worth of optometry CE for \$99.
- 4.12.5 RADM Hafner has retired.

4.13 CDC Optometry Report (Dr. Duenas): no report

5. Career Development/Promotions/Awards

- 5.1 **Billets:** no new information
- 5.2 **Promotions:** 9 commissioned officers eligible for promotion this cycle.
- 5.3 **Awards:** CAPT Jaworski will get nomination for Caplan and Hamilton Awards from CAPT Palma. If inadequate numbers of nominations are received, the nomination period may be extended. Nomination write-ups will be forwarded to all committee members for review.
- 5.4 **Readiness/OFRD:** no new information
- 5.5 **Assimilation:** There is a congressionally determined cap on the number of Regular Corps positions. All regular corps positions are either filled or soon to be filled. PHS is approaching congress with a request for more Regular Corps positions.

Officers may (and are encouraged to) apply for assimilation when they complete their probationary period. Assimilation is much easier earlier in one's career. Assimilation (or having applied for assimilation) is valuable when one is up for promotion.

Transfers from other services have been halted due to the lack of Regular Corps position. Since all military positions are Regular Corps, officers transferring must transfer into a Regular Corps position. Officers from other services wishing to transfer to PHS must decommission and then enter the PHS with a new commission as a Reserve Corps officer.

- 5.6 **Pay:** no new information
- 5.7 **Positions:** Currently there are 134 OD's on duty in the PHS and 47 OD vacancies (a vacancy rate of 11%). The greatest number of OD's are Commissioned Officers, followed by tribal and then Civil Service OD's. The number of tribal OD's is growing rapidly.

The average time to fill an OD position is growing, at about 9 months currently.

6. **Communications:** not discussed

7. Meetings and Recruitment Activities

- 7.1 **AMSUS:** November 11-16, 2007 Salt Lake City, Utah
- 7.2 **AAO:** October 24-27, 2007 Tampa, Florida
- 7.3 **BOTC:**
 - 7.3.1 In association with the COA meeting in June in Cincinnati

7.3.2 Bismarck, ND July 2007

7.4 SECO: February 21-27, 2007 Atlanta, GA

7.5 AFOS: February 20-21, 2007 Atlanta, Ga

7.6 Navajo Area IHS Optometry CE Conference: Support Staff CE 4/12/2007, Optometrist CE 4/13 and 4/14/2007. Contact CDR Larry Richardson at larryr@tcimc.ihs.gov.

7.7 COA: June 4-8, 2007, Cincinnati, OH.

7.8 AOA: June 27-July 1, 2007 Boston, MA

7.9 Federal Services Optometry Section Chiefs Meeting (sponsored by the AOA): CAPT Jaworski plans to attend to represent OPAG and PHS optometry. The date is a moving target, likely February or March.

8. Action and other items

8.1 Thanks to CAPT Ketcher for updating our committee membership on the HSO-PAC web site

8.2 IHS optometry practice settings survey questionnaire is still being tweaked.

8.3 Not discussed today, but remaining on the report from November 15, 2006 is the question of if/what to do to recognize Dr. Walls upon his retirement.

8.4 More information needed about Title 38 and Special Salary Rates

8.5 Recommendation made to request "Pearls" to be shared by HER Committee at 2008 IHS Eyecare Meeting.

9. OPAG Meetings

9.1 Next meeting March 7, 2007 at 1000 MST. Dial-up numbers and passcodes TBA.

9.2 Meeting schedule will be first Wednesday of odd months at 1000. Alternate plan will need to be made for July meeting date.

10. Meeting called to a close at 11:47 MST.

Respectfully submitted,

CAPT Gay E Nord, OD
Member, OPAG