



**Commissioned Officers Association
U.S. Public Health Service**

Fort Detrick Branch

**Fort Detrick COA Branch
Meeting May 3, 2005**

Members Attendance

LCDR Amy Anderson, President, (FDA)
CDR Jeff McKinney, Vice President, (NIH)
LT Sean Bryd, Treasurer, (FDA)
CAPT Edward Pfister, Member, (NIH)
CAPT Richard Potter, Member, (RET)
LCDR Leigh Ann Matheny, Member, (NIH)
LCDR Narayan Nair, Member, (FDA)
LT Kim Shiley, Member, (PSC)

- I. Introduction of Members Attending [2 minutes]
- II. Acceptance of Minutes: March 2005 [2 minutes]
 - A. CDR Jeff McKinney made a motion to accept the minutes. LCDR Narayan Nair seconds the motion.
- III. President's Report: LCDR Amy Anderson
 - A. LCDR Anderson presented information sent via CDR Lynn Slepski from National COA. CDR Slepski stated the Association is doing well financially and membership is at an all time high. Conference enrollment and hotel reservations are going very well and the Global Health Symposium looks like a good draw. Jerry Farrell is working hard on Capital Hill. Members should be on the look out for new member benefits, like a new database, allowing us to enable on-line renewals.
 - B. Transformation. After a pause in activities regarding Corps transformation as a result of the transition from DHHS Secretary Thompson to Secretary Leavitt, it seems that momentum may be building again. COA has learned that in the past few weeks, Secretary Leavitt has convened at least two meetings with the leadership of the Commissioned Corps to discuss Corps transformation. From reports we receive, these meetings have gone well with the Secretary demonstrating a significant appreciation of the Corps' role and the many issues surrounding transformation. The Secretary, we are told, asks the right questions. More meetings are planned. While eventual outcomes of these meetings are unknown, the fact that the Secretary is taking the time among the many



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huge and pressing issues on his plate to address the future of the Corps is a good sign. COA has communicated our position on transformation to the Secretary's Chief of Staff and we have offered our services to provide an independent view of the issues from our members' perspective. We are also working to distribute talking points on transformation on Capitol Hill and among individuals known to be supportive of the Corps and close to Secretary Leavitt as another means of getting our points across.

- C. 6th Precept. The 6th Promotion Precept is an effort to recognize the sacrifice of officers assigned to hardship, isolated and hard-to-fill duty stations. COA is concerned that this is an issue that if not handled with exceptional care, caution and sensitivity to the many facets of the problem, could drive a wedge right through the middle of the Commissioned Corps. A recommendation to provide promotion points of these assignments surfaced from within OCCFM in February. The proposal created significant concern and dissension from the CPO Board and almost all operating divisions except IHS. COA has yet to take a formal position on this question, except to point out our concern that in our view "due diligence" has not yet been conducted on the long term ramifications of such a promotion policy and that perhaps this February recommendation was premature. In brief, COA's concerns are:
1. A promotion system is supposed to measure and reward performance and evaluated potential for increased future contributions. Promotion systems are not generally designed to reward the nature of a geographic assignment. It's not where you work that matters; it's how well you work wherever you are.
 2. Any policy that is designed to advantage one group of officers over some other group will be correctly interpreted as designed to disadvantage that other group. This defeats the perceived fairness of the entire system.
 3. This whole question of rewarding isolated, hardship, and hard-to-fill assignments arose from the 2003 policy decision to reflect deployment readiness and deployments in the promotion system. COA expressed concerns with those flawed policies at the time and we are now concerned that the 6th Precept is an attempt to address an issue created by those policies - in effect, fixing one problem by creating another. Our recommendation, therefore, has been to overhaul the entire promotion system at once instead of the piecemeal approach, which has been favored over the last two years. We further caution, however, that such a comprehensive approach must wait until a billet-based force management system is in place so that the Corps has clearly defined requirements on which promotion policies must be based.



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As a result of the concerns expressed by the CPOs, operating divisions, OSG and others including COA, the 6th Precept has been wisely sent back to the drawing board. All of this does not mean that officers who accept assignments in isolated, hardship, or hard-to-fill duty stations should not be recognized and rewarded for their sacrifice. There are other more appropriate tools available to do just that and they should be used or legislation sought to permit their use.

- D. National Defense Service Medal. Recently there has been some renewed interest with DHHS about awarding the National Defense Service Medal to PHS officers for service in the global war on terrorism. COA provided the office of the Assistant Secretary for Health with copies of correspondence on this issue from two years ago along with supporting documentation from Title 42 USC.
- E. OCCO Staffing levels. COA was informed two weeks ago that the hiring freeze imposed on OCCO last year has been lifted. Since the reorganization from DCP last year, OCCO has been at about 70% of authorized strength which has been a serious impediment to the efficient and effective conduct of business. We are hopeful that OCCO will move quickly to fill vacancies.
- F. COA update. Staff changes. Following Matt Sigafoose's resignation in February, Carrie Bright also announced her intention to leave COA. We have since hired a Director of Government Relations, Judy Rensberger and a full time administrative assistant, Pamela Payne. Judy has considerable experience in legislative affairs having worked a number of years for the American Dental Association. Judy also holds an MPH from Columbia University. We are still looking for a Development Director who will work primarily for the Foundation.
 - 1. Membership growth. COA now claims more than 7200 members. That's the largest the Association has ever been since we started keeping records about 50 years ago. 72% of active duty officers are COA members. We'd like to see that number continue to grow!
- G. Senator Frist Introduces Global Health Corps Act of 2005. Last week Senator Frist introduced legislation in the Senate that would create a volunteer force of health professionals to work overseas. Described by some as a Peace Corps for health professionals, the intent of the legislation is to provide the human resources needed to carry out the President's plan to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS and other diseases in developing and underdeveloped countries. The PHS Commissioned Corps is included in the legislation in that it also calls for the creation of a global emergency medical response cadre beginning with a minimum of 250 PHS Commissioned Officers. There are broad implications in this bill for the



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Commissioned Corps beyond the emergency response piece. We are also informed that Senator Lieberman is working on similar legislation. And rumors continue to persist that movement is underway in the Department of Homeland Security to create their own emergency medical response component. COA is working to be engaged on all this bills.

- IV. Administrative Reports [5 minutes]
- A. Treasurer's and Fund Raising Activities: LT Sean Byrd
1. LT Byrd informed the group that he recently received the Branch's financial statement with a balance of \$718.29. He stated he still needs to obtain the bank books so he can deposit the \$45.00 check from the basket raffle held in January and the membership check for \$182.50. The current Branch balance is **\$718.29 + \$45.00 + \$182.50 = \$945.79.**
- B. Military Standards Cadre (MSC)/Physical Fitness: LCDR Rick Gussio
1. LCDR Gussio was not available to provide a report. CAPT Pfister stated the Physical Fitness test held in April received five participants, which was conducted on the ¼ mile track by the swimming pool. The Fitness Center on Fort Detrick also recently opened an indoor pool, which was stated to be a nice addition.
- C. Webmaster: LCDR Rick Gussio
1. No report.
- D. Community Activities: CDR Katherine Berkhausen
1. LCDR Anderson reported on the proposal to conduct a combined committee project. This project would entail all Branch committees working together to obtain donations from local businesses to conduct a raffle with ½ the proceeds going back into the Frederick County community. A discussion took place and there was unanimous consent to conduct the raffle. Instructions regarding the raffle would be coming out by LCDR Anderson in the next couple of weeks. Branch Committee Members were encouraged to start soliciting gifts. The raffle drawing is to be held during the annual picnic on July 16, 2005. Currently, LT Byrd reported that we have one donated prize for an all inclusive dinner for two from any Marriott Restaurant in the U.S., excluding alcohol. He requested assistance to develop a letter using the Branch letterhead to show businesses we are a legitimate organization. LCDR Anderson will be facilitating the Committee Combined Project. CAPT Pfister also stated he would contact Microsoft to see if they would be willing to donate or allow us to purchase at a reduced rate an IPOD to be utilized as a prize for the raffle. Other businesses mentioned included Home Depot and



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Lowes. Discussion also took place of who would be the recipients for the money that was raised. Organizations included Frederick County Humane Society, Beacon House, Way Station and Jeannine Buzzard. Each Branch member will be asked to purchase/sell a minimum of 10 tickets for \$1.00 a piece. CDR Robert Edwards offered to make the raffle tickets and LCDR Leigh Ann Matheny offered to sell them at the National COA Conference in Philadelphia, PA, if the tickets were ready to be sold.

- E. Social Activities: LCDR Claire Karlson
 - 1. LCDR Karlson sent her report via email stating the annual picnic is underway. LCDR Gussio has already reserved the Pavilion 1 picnic area with approval for light alcoholic beverages on July 16, 2005 from 1500-2100. The Social Activities Committee will be sending out the flier and an invitation for the picnic in June. At this time, there is no definite word about the Christmas party to be held on December 3, 2005, but there is one place under consideration in Purcellville called the Grill. CDR Rossi-Coajou is to provide more options in the near future. There has also been a request from a Branch member to consider that the Xmas party be more casual than formal, which will require a vote by the November meeting.
- F. Membership: LCDR Amy Anderson
 - 1. This committee continues to obtain updates on a monthly basis from National COA. We are currently at 50 members. We did receive two new members since the last meeting and LCDR Anderson sent a welcome letter to LT Kim Shiley and LT Monica Zeballos.
- V. Ongoing Business
 - A. Flag: CDR Tom Doss
 - 1. No report and will be placed as a future agenda item.
- VI. New Business [7 minutes]
 - A. Frederick Science Fair: CDR Jeff McKinney
 - 1. CDR McKinney provided a brief overview of the Frederick Science Fair, which is conducted on an annual basis at the Walkersville High School. He encouraged that we as a Branch start thinking now about volunteering our services and working with the event's coordinator, as well as the Washington D.C. Branch, Martha O'Lone, who have recently taken an active role. Participating would entail working and judging the entries with breakfast and lunch provided. CDR McKinney also stated the



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Commissioned Corps has the largest contingency of volunteers, with the U.S. Army also providing approximately three individuals. The group agreed this event is a worthwhile cause and will need to be placed as a future agenda item for the Community Activities Committee to coordinate volunteers. CDR McKinney stated the next Fair will be held in March 2006 and he is willing to take the lead for the project.

- VII. Round the Table
 - A. Final Comments from Members and Attendees [5 minutes]
 - 1. No comments.

- VIII. Guest Speaker: CAPT (RET) Richard Potter, Space A Travel

- IX. Date and Time for Next Meeting
 - A. The next Fort Detrick COA Branch Meeting will be the family picnic July 16, 2005 on Fort Detrick. The event will be held from 1500-2100. The leader is LCDR Amy Anderson.

If you have questions or comments, please contact:
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